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A Nice Goodbye

Hey! Just letting you know that the first few chapters of this fic are bad. It gets better as it goes on, but it's rough at first. I'm not editing it because I think it's important to see my growth as a writer. So if you're reading this for the first time, I hope you enjoy! If you're rereading it... why? Also, this fic is very much for adults. Not because it's smut or extremely edgy or something, but because of the themes in it, and it does not shy away from certain subjects. So be aware.

"YES YES YES!" Peacemaker jumped up and down excitedly. He had wanted to go to Jade Mountain Academy for a while now, and he finally could!

"Alright, easy tiger," his mother said. Foeslayer was an amazing mother, but sometimes, she acted slightly nervous around him.

"Do you think I'll see Moon there today?" Peacemaker asked. He had always liked Moon. She was exceedingly kind and smart, but whenever he was around her, she always seemed to keep an eye on him. He assumed it was a NightWing trait, but he didn't get it because he was a hybrid. *Actually, I don't think that's a genetic thing, now that I think about it. That wouldn't make much sense,* he thought.

"More than likely. She's always going back and forth between the school and the Rainforest, helping out wherever she can. And the first day of school is always the most difficult and stressful day. So promise me you'll be on your best behavior. Especially today," Foeslayer said. She had that nervous expression again.

"Of course I promise. You know I'm a dragon of my word," Peacemaker said. Foeslayer let out a quiet chuckle, and pulled him into a hug.

"I love you," she said. Peacemaker returned the hug, leaning into his mother. She always gave the second best hugs he's ever had, next to

a certain IceWing he knows. Moons, I hope she's there.

"I love you too," Peacemaker said back. He took a step back, opened the door to the hut they live in. The sun shone through the Rainforest trees. There was a squirrel staring at him from a branch just above him. He took another look back at his mother, and waved goodbye to her. She waved back as he took off.

Alright, Jade Mountain. Should be directly west of here. Peacemaker always had a great sense of direction. But it was throwing him off slightly without his mother there. He had to admit, he had already missed her, even though it hadn't even been a full minute since he left. But he pressed on, eager to see his friend and make new ones.

The Meeting

"See you later, Mink. Be good," Queen Snowfall said, hugging her sister, and then flying off.

Alright, where's Peacemaker? Hope he'll be here. It'll be a long year without him, Mink thought. She had met the hybrid in Possibility a couple years ago. He was the first NightWing to ever be really nice to her, especially after the Battle of Jade Mountain.

She really needed to get away from the Ice Kingdom, because being next in line for the throne is really exhausting. A lot of IceWings want to spend time with her. When Mink was younger, she loved it. She loved talking to other dragons. But as she got a bit older, she found it kind of creepy that they all wanted to talk and spend time with her. So she left for Possibility, and the heat she felt on her scales from the desert was mildly uncomfortable.

"Whoops!" She said as she crash-landed on top of a NightWing. The NightWing fell to the ground with an "oof!"

"What a fun way to greet someone," he said, laughing.

"I'm sorry! I'm so sorry! I'm not much of a flier! And landing has never really been my strongest suit!" Mink apologized, getting off of him.

"Haha, it's alright! I wish every dragon greeted me like that," he said, stretching out his wings. As he did this, Mink noticed the underside of his wings were many different colors, and it was oddly beautiful.

"Whoa! What's going on with your wings?" Mink asked.

"Oh, I'm part RainWing. I don't know who my father was, but I guess he was a RainWing," he explained. "I'm Peacemaker by the way."

"Oh! I'm Mink," she said cheerfully. It had occurred to Mink that she could sit here and talk to this dragon forever. "What brought you to Possibility?"

"Getting away from my mother. I love her dearly, but she gets really nervous when I go anywhere, so I left behind her back, and came here. I swear, she acts like I'm gonna turn into some extremely evil dragon with powerful magic," he explained. *Three moons, I could seriously listen to him ramble for years!*

"Ah. I came here for a very similar reason. Getting away from being a princess. Everyone wants to talk to me, it's pretty annoying," Mink said. Peacemaker's expression shifted from attentive to curious.

"Princess?" He asked, tilting his head. He didn't actually seem all that shocked, which surprised Mink.

"Yup. Next in line for the throne unless my sister has any dragonets. But I doubt she will. She's been eyeing a dragoness a lot lately." She whispered that last part, and earned a laugh from Peacemaker.

So they sat there and talked and talked and talked and talked until they realized it was getting rather dark, the three moons above their heads. But they didn't want to leave.

"Alright, weird request. Wanna lie down, and sleep right here, right now? Or is that too weird?" Peacemaker asked.

"I would, but I don't want to wake up to IceWing guards searching for me because Snowfall had a panic attack. I hope you understand. Otherwise, I'd totally do it. I'll see you later," Mink said. She decided "screw it" and pulled him into a hug, the action catching Peacemaker by surprise. "Thank you."

Peacemaker returned the hug. "For what?" He asked.

"For talking to me, and not being weird about it. Not easy to come by." They pulled their heads away but still had their wings around each other. "I uh- I guess I'll see you around. Maybe we could meet up again?"

"Sure!" Peacemaker said. "Maybe tomorrow?" Mink laughed slightly,

and nodded.

"See you tomorrow," she said before flying off.

Explaining to Snowfall why she was gone for so long was easier than she thought it'd be. She didn't actually seem mad, just worried, which surprised Mink.

"As long as he didn't hurt you," Snowfall said.

"I'm fine. Seriously. He was actually really sweet," Mink said.

So they saw each other pretty much every single day. After about a year, Peacemaker seemed like he was acting a lot sweeter, and was starting to talk to her gentler. A month before going to Jade Mountain, they had told each other they got accepted into the school, and they were both excited to be spending the whole year together. But the day after, Peacemaker stopped showing up. Mink was worried sick, and was scared something happened to him. But she was young. There wasn't anything she could do. So she had to wait until school started to see if he was alright.

Fortunately, school started today. So she had to hope he would show up. After about 30 minutes, she was becoming increasingly worried, until she spotted a black dragon flying towards her, with a rainbow under his wings.

"PEACEMAKER!" Mink shouted. The hybrid flew to her faster until he crashed into her the way she did when they met. "Really?" She laughed.

"I missed you!" Peacemaker said, digging his head in her neck. Mink wrapped her wings around him.

"Well, I missed you more!" She said. Peacemaker climbed off of her, and helped her up. "Where were you?"

"I'm so sorry. My mother was getting suspicious about me leaving, and was getting really worried about me. I wanted to come, I truly did. I just couldn't do that to my mother anymore," he explained.

"Hey, it's alright. I understand," Mink said, pulling him into another

hug, resting her head on his shoulder. "I'm just glad you're alright. I was worried about you."

"Yeah, I'm alright. Nothing's gonna happen to me."

That Escalated Quickly

Peacemaker was disappointed when he found out he wasn't going to be Mink's clawmate. But he's sharing a room with a really nice SkyWing named Cliff. And he turned out to be a prince.

"Why is it that every dragon I meet ends up being royalty?" Peacemaker asked himself.

"No idea! But aren't you excited to be here!? I've wanted to come here since I was a young dragonet! Well... younger," Cliff said excitedly.

Peacemaker sat on his bed patiently. The first day was about exploration, but he had been to Jade Mountain many times before just to visit, so he knew his way around. "Well, I'm gonna go explore! Wanna come?" Cliff asked.

"Hm? Oh, not yet. I'll join you in a moment. I'm just waiting for someone. Meet you in the prey center?" Peacemaker said. Cliff gave him a thumbs up, and ran off. "Alright then..."

This feels... odd. "What? Who said that!?" Peacemaker said, standing up.

I have a body, yet... I'm not in control of it. "Am I- am I just hearing random voices? If so, I'm just gonna ignore them," Peacemaker said, slightly nervous.

I can feel every emotion you're feeling. Right now, you're scared. I can assure you, there's no reason to be. Not unless I give you a reason to be.

"He's not real. I'm just hearing things," Peacemaker told himself.

I'm very real. But are you? Am I sure I'm not just dreaming? I can't control anything. I can only see what you see. It's like I'm

only in your head. Who are you?

"Um... Peacemaker," he said.

Interesting.

"Who are you?" Peacemaker asked, starting to freak out a bit.

It doesn't matter. Is this Jade Mountain Academy? This room is bigger than I remembered. Did they expand it this much since I was last here? It wasn't that long, was it? How long has it been since the Battle of Jade Mountain?

"Um. Five years, I think."

Five years!? Why does this keep happening to me!? Peacemaker, do you know Moonwatcher?

"Y-yeah. Why?"

As much as I cared for her, she betrayed me. She must pay.

"That's a bit dramatic, don't you think? Moon is one of the nicest dragons I've ever met. I don't think she'd ever do something like that."

Hm. And then he was gone.

"Hello? Are you there?"

"Who?" Peacemaker turned around and saw Mink standing in the doorway.

"Y-you didn't hear that?" Peacemaker asked, panicking slightly.

"No? Are you ok?" Mink asked, sliding a wing around him. Even with the cold scales, Peacemaker always felt warm when he was against Mink.

"I-I think so. I just... heard a voice." Mink looked as confused as Peacemaker felt.

"Alright, you're freaking me out. The year just started and you're

already hearing voices. Maybe we should take you to Clay," Mink suggested.

"No, no. Isn't that a bit much to put on him on the first day?" Peacemaker said.

"Knock knock?" Moonwatcher appeared in the doorway. "Something wrong?"

"Moon! I know if anyone could hear it, it'd be you! Didn't you hear the voice!?" Peacemaker asked, sweating a bit.

Is that Moon? Moon gasped when she heard the voice.

"Peacemaker, will you come with me?" Moon asked, clearly nervous about something.

That damn NightWing will pay. Along with her SandWing boyfriend and RainWing and IceWing friends. And that SeaWing? I can't kill him. But I can hurt him. I can show him the pain I felt almost every day. I can kill everyone he loves right in front of him.

"Peacemaker, listen to me," Moon said, leading him down the hallway and into a more private room, which Peacemaker assumed was Moon's room, since there was a bed and a rack of scrolls. "Try to shut him out."

"I-I can't. It's like he's a part of me! He's in my brain, and I can't do anything!"

Moon! Hey Moon!

"What is it, Darkstalker?"

"D-Darkstalker? What? W-who's that?" Moon pulled out a sheet of parchment and dipped her claw in an ink pot, and began writing.

Moon, where's your boyfriend? I'd sure love to pay him a visit.

Moon moved the parchment away, and pulled another one out. "None of your concern, Darkstalker."

"MOON! Would you please tell me what's going on!?" Moon looked at him, fear in her eyes.

"I'll explain everything when your mother and Qibli get here. For now, just sit here. I'll stay here with you, try to keep you calm, ok?" Moon said. Peacemaker knew better than to argue with Moon, so he just nodded and sat on her bed. She looked outside her room, and ran into Fatespeaker. "Send this one to Qibli, and this one to Peacemaker's mother." She also whispered something out of Peacemaker's hearing. Fatespeaker nodded and ran off. Moon sat down beside Peacemaker and put a wing around him. He had always felt comfortable with her, so he leaned against her.

I'll figure out how to take control of this body eventually. And then Moon... you'll pay for what you did.

You're Not Annoying

Where is he? Cliff thought. *Aw man, did he ditch me? Am I that annoying?*

He sat in the prey center, watching a chicken run around. *Aw man, no one's gonna want to be my friend.* As he thought that, an IceWing walked in, looking nervous.

Maybe she'll be my friend. He got up and the IceWing immediately looked in his direction, and added confusion to the nervous expression.

"Uh, hi," Cliff said. "You ok? You look upset." As he said this, a MudWing student and SeaWing student pushed past the IceWing, almost knocking her over, but Cliff caught her.

"Thanks. I'm just worried about my friend. He's acting really strange, and it even scared Moon. What're you doing here on your own?" She asked.

"My clawmate said he'd meet me here, but he hasn't come. He probably thinks I'm really annoying, and I can't really blame him," Cliff said, looking away.

"Aw, come on. You're not annoying. Far from it. Who're you waiting for?" Mink asked.

"Um. His name is Peacemaker." Hearing this, Mink just stared at him.

"Yeah, uh... coincidentally, that's who I was worried about. Yeah, he's not gonna be coming," Mink said. Cliff's wings drooped, as he kind of liked the hybrid. He was kind, and didn't seem annoyed with Cliff yet. "He said he was hearing a voice. I thought he was schizophrenic or something, but then Moonwatcher came in, and when she heard the voice, she seemed really worried. So now I'm

worried."

"Wanna go find him?" Cliff asked. Mink shrugged.

"We probably shouldn't interrupt them. It seemed really serious."

"I'm sure Moon wouldn't mind! C'mon, let's go!" Cliff ran past her. Mink sighed, and reluctantly followed.

He's Loud

Moon, you know I could've made the world perfect. You and Qibli could've been happier together. You wouldn't have to be far from each other all the time. And I could've gotten rid of the grumpy IceWing for you, so you wouldn't have to deal with him.

"No. We love Winter. He's changed a lot for us. As for you... no one would ever be happy under your rule," Moon said, still with her wing around Peacemaker.

They could be if I made them.

"Animus magic is gone, Darkstalker."

WHAT!?

He roared so loud, it gave Peacemaker a powerful headache. "Could you not? If I'm gonna be stuck with you in my head, talking to me constantly, could you not yell?" He said.

I'll do what I damn well please.

"Moon? Everything alright?" A yellow, scarred face poked into the room.

"Qibli!" She ran up to him and wrapped her wings around him, and he did the same.

"Aww, Moon! It's only been a week!" Qibli said.

Ew.

"That's a week too long," Moon said. Peacemaker got up and Qibli saw him.

"Hey, bud. You doing okay?" He asked gently. Peacemaker

shrugged.

"Moon! Qibli! Where's Peacemaker!?" Peacemaker knew that voice. His mother appeared in the doorway. "There you are! Are you okay? Has he said anything to hurt you?"

"He's given me a headache because he's loud. Does that count?"

Foeslayer?

"Wait, you know my mother?"

***My* mother.**

"What? Are you my brother or something?"

I hope not.

"Peacemaker, you're gonna want to sit down for this," Moon said.

The Truth

"I think they went this way?" Mink said. They had been wandering around for a while. The school was large, and it was almost like a maze. They ran around longer until they heard Moon's voice.

"And the strawberry was enchanted."

"Yeah. Darkstalker ate it, and that's where you came from." Was that... Qibli?

"A strawberry!?" That was Peacemaker. "I came from a strawberry!? I was Darkstalker, and a strawberry turned me into this!? I never came from a damn egg!?"

What's he talking about?

"I'm not even real!? I'm just a creation made by magic to put an end to an evil dragon!?" He cried. Mink decided to sneak a peek inside. She saw Peacemaker sitting on a bed, next to who Mink could assume is his mother. Tears were streaming down Peacemaker's face.

Not real? What does he mean? He's always felt real to me. Well, real or not, he's still one of the nicest dragons I've ever met, and I don't regret a thing!

"Sweetheart, you're real to us. And I love you anyway. I have always loved you, whether you're trying to take over the world, or you come into this world via a strawberry, it doesn't matter. You're still my dragonet, and I wouldn't change a thing about you. You're one of the kindest, most sincere dragons I've ever known. That's not the strawberry, that's you," Foeslayer said.

"It sort of was the strawberry, but that's not the point," Qibli pointed out. Moon and Foeslayer shot glares at him.

"No, the strawberry was supposed to turn him into a dragon that wouldn't be evil. He still could've been a very mean dragon. But he chose not to be, and that was him." Foeslayer pulled Peacemaker into a hug, and he buried his head into her neck.

Jeez, this must be a lot to take in all at once.

"I maybe should have told you guys sooner," Moon said. "There's been two dragons listening in on us for a while. I just didn't say anything because I know Peacemaker trusts them."

Whoops. Mink and Cliff looked at each other, and decided to step in. "Uhhh... hey! Sorry, I'm just a curious dragon!" Mink looked at Peacemaker, and a sad smile formed on his face when he saw her.

"You're Winter's cousin, aren't you?" Moon asked. Mink nodded. She didn't actually know much about her cousin. All she knew was that his family practically ruined his life, and that everyone thought he died in the Diamond Trials.

Moon looked over in Peacemaker's direction, and Peacemaker had a frown on his face. "Three moons, Darkstalker! That's way too far!" Moon said.

"What'd he say?" Qibli asked.

"Some kind of slur for IceWings, I assume," Peacemaker said. "Darkstalker, SHUT UP! I don't care if you hate IceWings! Well, that's your problem! Mink isn't gonna kill me! I don't care if IceWings have a history of betrayal! Things have changed!"

Moon sighed. "How've you been Cliff?"

"Great! I love it here! I'm just so confused about everything that's happening right now! And my mother is thinking about stepping down as queen. She says it's been way too stressful for her and her mental health is diminishing," he rambled.

"How's Queen Snowfall doing?" Qibli asked.

"Um. Good I think. She has a girlfriend now, which sucks for me because that means I'm gonna have to be queen when she's gone.

But I'm happy for her," Mink explained.

"DARKSTALKER! SHUT THE HELL UP!" Moon yelled. This sudden violence shocked everyone, especially Qibli.

"Three moons, calm down," Qibli said.

"Hey, is everything alright in here?" A blue head poked in, and Mink recognized it as Tsunami, the SeaWing Dragonet of Destiny, the head of the school, and the SeaWing representative that went to Pantala.

"Things have been better," Qibli said.

"School just started. How are they already in trouble? And Peacemaker's mother is here!? It was that bad!? When are Snowfall and Ruby gonna get here!?"

"TSUNAMI! They're not in trouble! Calm down!" Moon yelled. "There was just a bit of a situation. It's... mostly under control. I'll tell you later."

"How about... you tell me now?" Tsunami said, starting to get annoyed. Moon sighed.

"Alright. Everyone but Tsunami can go if they want. Thank you for coming Foeslayer," Moon said.

"If anything happens, send a letter to me. I'll be there," she said. Moon nodded, and they all left except for Tsunami and Qibli. "Will you be okay, Peacemaker?" Peacemaker nodded, and his mother wrapped her wings around him.

"Cliff? Maybe we should give them some privacy?" Mink suggested.

"Hm? Oh, yeah! Sure!" He said. "Y'know... they're not gonna get much privacy considering they're standing in the middle of a school hall."

"Shush," Mink said, pulling Cliff away.

Repressed anger

The next few weeks haven't been too bad. Darkstalker tended to be quiet during classes, which surprised Peacemaker. He seemed like the type of dragon to talk a lot in school. But during free time, he would constantly complain about how boring class is

Webs is so boring! Tsunami is so damn strict! Sunny and Fatespeaker are super annoying! Clay is as dull as rusted iron! Starflight is a goddamn nerd!

Meanwhile, Moon had been keeping a close eye on Peacemaker, but he honestly felt like he didn't need it. The worst Darkstalker had done so far was stay silent for an entire day.

He was mostly quiet when Peacemaker hung out with Mink. However, Darkstalker wasn't subtle at all about his hatred for her, but Mink didn't mind. She actually found it hilarious. And her laugh always pisses off Darkstalker, because he hates it when she's happy. But every insult makes her laugh, and it's adorable to Peacemaker. Mink's clawmates, on the other talon, weren't so fond of the insults. Bumblebee, a HiveWing with far too much energy, and Auklet, a SeaWing princess who was really sarcastic, but that was one of the things Peacemaker loved about her. Bumblebee was nice, but she was hard to talk to. She interrupted a lot, and talked way too much.

"Mink, Mink! Guess what! The Quartz Winglet's MudWing looked at me for three whole seconds! Does this mean what I think it means!?" Bumblebee said ecstatically.

"I think it means that-" Mink started

"He likes me! Do you think that's what it means!? I think that's what it means!"

"-he thinks you're insane," Mink finished.

"That's one way to put it," Auklet said. "Other ways include the word 'psychopath.'"

"Well, it's alright Bumblebee. We all still love you," Peacemaker said.

'We?'

Yes, 'we.' Peacemaker thought. He realized he didn't have to talk to Darkstalker out loud. Darkstalker could hear every single thought he had. Every. Single. Thought. Ever since he found out about that, he tried his best to not have thoughts that would scar or disgust Darkstalker. He wasn't too worried about Moon (who was sitting in the corner reading a scroll) hearing his thoughts because she was basically a pro at blocking them out.

"Awww thanks!" Bumblebee said, giving Peacemaker a hug.

"Speak for yourself," Auklet said, grabbing a scroll at random off a shelf. They were in the library. This was their go-to spot to hang out. Mostly because Starflight didn't care if they were there. Cliff was asking Starflight about an anatomy scroll for a health class.

Cliff was always so worried they found him annoying, which was ridiculous because he was probably the least annoying out of all of them.

He is annoying.

Shut up. He's not annoying.

Mhm.

"So, what're you guys gonna do over break next week?" Mink asked.

"See my parents," Bumblebee said.

"Adoptive parents," Auklet said, not looking up from her scroll. Bumblebee pouted.

"You don't have to remind me! I'm lucky it's THEM who adopted me and not a terrible family!"

"Auklet, please be nice," Moon said.

"I'm gonna go see my mother. She's probably gonna ask me a lot of questions about how Darkstalker's been acting, so that'll be interesting," Peacemaker said.

"I don't really feel like seeing my mother. She's been really racist towards other tribes lately. Tsunami and Anemone don't wanna see her either. And it's not that I don't love her. She's just... difficult," Auklet explained.

"Yeah. Queen Glory and Queen Thorn let some SeaWings that didn't want to live in the Sea Kingdom anymore come live in their kingdoms," Peacemaker said.

"I'm gonna go see my mother too," Cliff said. "I miss her a lot."

"What about you Mink?" Peacemaker asked.

"I don't really have any plans I guess. I honestly don't feel like flying all the way back to the Ice Kingdom," she said.

"Well, you know you're always welcome at my place," Peacemaker said.

Greaaaaaat.

Foeslayer had first spoken to Mink last week and they got along really well. The only bad part is that she teases Peacemaker a lot about Mink. Calling her pretty RIGHT in front of her, trying to embarrass him, which was SO UNCALLED FOR.

Mink knew how he felt for her, but she didn't know how she felt. He knew not to rush her feelings. It was her decision, and he didn't want to force her to feel anything.

I'm pretty sure everyone knows. You're not very subtle about it.

"Thank you," Mink said. "But I can't do that to you two. That's just another mouth to feed."

"It's really no big deal. It's a rainforest. There's fruit everywhere."

There was a loud crack of thunder that made everyone jump a bit. It was raining heavily outside, and there was extremely loud thunder.

"I hate thunder!" Bumblebee said.

"Come on, it's not that bad. At least to some extent," Cliff said.

"It's not nice in the Rainforest. We're always worried about lightning striking a tree, and starting a fire. Last time that happened, there was a big fire that killed three RainWings and two NightWings," Peacemaker explained.

"Anyone you knew?" Auklet asked.

"No, but it was still sad."

"Have anywhere you can go to Auklet?" Cliff asked.

"Not really. It's fine, I'll probably just stay here." Auklet said that last part at the same time Cliff said, "you're welcome to come to the Sky Kingdom."

Auklet stared at him. Cliff had a very visible crush on Auklet, and she somehow never noticed.

Because she's a clueless dragon, being related to Fathom.

Darkstalker had mentioned Fathom before, saying how he hates Auklet because she apparently resembles him.

She's probably the smartest out of all of us.

Then why doesn't she ever use her brain?

"Um... sure?" Auklet said, giving Cliff a slight blush.

"AWWWWWWW!" Bumblebee exclaimed.

"Can it, buzzy!"

"What about you Moon? What'll you do over break?" Mink asked.

"What?" Moon said, looking up from her scroll. "Oh, probably gonna visit Qibli."

Go with her. Ruin it for her.

No, shut up.

Moon looked at Peacemaker and rolled her eyes.

"RAAH! If I find that damn NightWing, I'll kill him!" A voice said from the library doorway.

"Yeah, yeah, we get it. You hate him. You're being kinda dramatic, aren't you?" Another voice said.

"No! Don't you find it odd that he just disappeared after killing loads of IceWings by sending a plague out, including the queen!?"

"I don't think it's that big of a deal," a third voice said.

"Of course you don't, you lazy sack of crap!"

Three dragons entered the library, an IceWing, a NightWing, and a RainWing. The IceWing seemed to be the angry one.

They're talking about me.

Yeah, I got that.

"What're you all looking at!?" The IceWing spat.

"You. You're pretty loud," Bumblebee said. The IceWing glared at her. He spotted Mink and immediately bowed.

"My apologies, your majesty!" He looked at the NightWing and RainWing. "Bow, you nitwits!"

"No, don't. Get up Silver. I've told you a million times, I don't like it when dragons bow to me. It just makes me uncomfortable," Mink said.

"My apologies, your majesty," Silver said, getting up.

"And stop being so formal. Just call me Mink. How many times do I have to tell you that?"

"Once more, as always," Silver said. The RainWing and NightWing smirked. Silver squinted his eyes at Peacemaker. "Is this NightWing bothering you?"

"No! He hasn't even done anything wrong! Jeez, I thought IceWings have gotten over their hatred for NightWings!" Mink said.

"Not me. I still think Foeslayer ruined our tribe. Can't trust any of them, let alone be friends with them." Peacemaker let out a low growl. "Oh, does that bother you?"

Calm yourself. You see why I hate IceWings?

"Silver, back off, or else I'll-" Moon started.

"Or what? Gonna tell Tsunami? Yeah, super scared."

"Well, you're hanging out with a NightWing right now. So you obviously don't hate them," Auklet said.

"I hate SeaWings too. Let me guess. Princess Auklet? Descendant of Prince Fathom? You're not much better."

"JUST GET OUT OF HERE!" Peacemaker yelled, making everyone jump. Starflight even looked in their direction.

Or don't listen to me. That works too.

I'll kill him if I have to.

Alriiiiight, you have a lot of repressed anger. I get that you're angry. Just try to think of things that'll calm you down.

"Alright Silver, please get out of here. I don't really need to see blood spilled on the ground," Mink said.

Silver growled lowly at Peacemaker, before finally turning and

leaving, his friends following.

"That was scary," Cliff said.

"That was awesome!" Bumblebee said.

"Peacemaker, are you okay?" Mink asked.

"I'm fine!" Peacemaker said a little more aggressively than he meant.

"You're obviously not. I've never seen you lash out like that. I didn't know you were that sensitive about your mother."

"She didn't do anything wrong."

"I know, I know. Just calm down, alright? Silver just has a hard time letting go of grudges. Even ones that happened thousands of years ago. Your mother is a wonderful dragon, and you're very lucky to be hers. Don't pay any attention to Silver, okay?"

Or you could slit his throat in his sleep.

Peacemaker felt some guilt in him because he was slightly tempted to do that. But he saw Moon's face when Darkstalker said that, and decided against it.

"Yeah, and remind me not to get on your bad side," Auklet said.

"And for what it's worth, I think you're a pretty great friend," Mink said, pulling him into a hug.

What if there is something wrong with me? Peacemaker thought, putting his wings around Mink.

There might be. Don't know, don't care. Just don't end up getting yourself killed. If you die, I die. And I don't want that.

Gee, thanks for your concern.

"Yeah, we all do!" Cliff said.

Look, if you're really worried about losing your temper, go talk

to Moon or my- OUR mother.

He thought about that. He didn't want to put more on their shoulders than he already had.

He sighed. *Alright. I'll think about it.*

'Sup

Why did I agree to this? Auklet thought. Her and Cliff were currently flying to the Sky Kingdom, and Auklet was very nervous for some reason. Cliff seemed very nervous too. She caught him sneaking glances in her direction. He hardly spoke the entire flight, but Auklet didn't entirely mind. It always surprised her whenever he did speak.

"Hey, you alright? You're being so quiet. Am I that off-putting?" He asked.

Yes. "No, no. I'm just a bit tired, that's all. What about you? You've been awfully quiet too," Auklet said.

"W-well, I'm just uh- leaving room for you to speak, if uh- if you wanna. N-no pressure, of course," Cliff stuttered.

Cliff always spoke to Auklet differently than to the others. He always seems much more polite, or spoke gentler. Auklet had suspicions as to why that was, but she didn't bring it up because Cliff always kind of froze up when she did. She always thought that was funny, but she didn't do it very much because she wasn't cruel.

"Right. Well, have I ever seemed like the 'talkative' type?" She said.

"Um- no. Not really. Sorry," Cliff said, looking away. Now Auklet felt bad. Cliff was weirdly good at doing that to her. "There it is!"

Auklet looked ahead and saw Queen Ruby's palace. Oh boy, here we go. She was always nervous about meeting another queen. When she first met Queen Thorn, she was terrified. But she turned out to be a very laid-back and nice queen. Queen Ruby, Queen Snowfall, and Queen Moorhen are the queens she hasn't met yet, and she wasn't particularly excited to meet Queen Snowfall. She seemed very intimidating.

"Don't be nervous to meet my mother. She's very nice," Cliff said.

"What? I'm not nervous at all! What makes you think that?" Auklet said. Cliff looked away again, and Auklet felt bad again. *Why does this keep happening?*

They landed at the main entrance to the palace and were met by two guards. "Prince Cliff. Welcome back," one said. They both bowed, eyeing Auklet.

"'Sup," she said. Cliff put a wing around her and ushered her inside. She stiffened a bit at his touch but followed.

"Sorry, those two are very wary of strangers," Cliff said. Auklet nodded as he removed his wing from her back. They walked around the palace, and Auklet realized it was a lot nicer than the Deep Sea Palace. Cliff briefly explained the history of a lot of the stuff that they passed, and if Auklet was being honest, she didn't get bored at all. She never had any interest in history or historical artifacts, but she liked how Cliff was brief and got right to the point. He was much better at it than Webs. They stopped when they got to a large door.

"Alright, my mother should be in here. Let me go in first, just in case she doesn't want visitors," he said.

"You couldn't have made sure I was allowed to be here before inviting me to come?" Auklet said.

"S-sorry. I can fly you to the Sea Kingdom if she says 'no.'" He said. He opened the door. "Mom?" No response. He looked in and saw Ruby wasn't in there. "W-where is she!?"

Cliff was panicking, which seemed a little unnecessary to Auklet. "Hey, maybe you're overreacting? She's probably just out doing something. Calm down," she said.

"She is," a voice said behind them. They turned and saw an orange, glowing SkyWing carefully approach them. She looked like she was trying really hard not to touch anything.

"Peril! Where's my mother!?" Cliff asked.

"She's fine! She's out speaking with Queen Thorn in the Sand Kingdom. She should be back tomorrow. Who's this?" Peril asked, pointing at Auklet.

"I'm Auklet," the SeaWing said, holding out a talon. Peril didn't shake her talon. Instead, she looked away nervously. "Did I do something?"

"No. She can't touch anything. She has firescales," Cliff explained.

"Oh, my bad," Auklet said, awkwardly pulling her talon away.

"Alright, I'm gonna go. Talking to new dragons isn't my forte," Peril said. She turned around and left before Cliff and Auklet could say anything.

"Don't mind her. She's been hated by the entire continent most of her life, so she's not the most social dragon," Cliff said quietly. "Come on! I can show you to a guest room."

Auklet let herself be led down multiple long hallways, until they stopped at the entrance to another large room. It had a large bed which looked comfortable enough. More comfortable than the seaweed beds in the Sea Kingdom.

"Sorry, I know it's not really much, but-"

"It's fine. Don't worry about it," Auklet reassured Cliff. "It's awfully big for a guest room, isn't it?"

"Yeah, Queen Scarlet always had to be 'the best' so she made everything massive," Cliff explained.

Queen Scarlet. She had only heard that name once from her mother. And from the way Coral talked about her, Auklet assumed it's for the best that she's dead. Although, it's entirely possible it was just Coral being racist towards SkyWings. But she rarely said anything about Queen Ruby, so she assumed not.

"Alright, I gotta leave you for now. When my mom's gone, I gotta run the kingdom since there's no king or princess. You're welcome to come with me, but it's nothing exciting at all. It's extremely

boring," Cliff said.

"Alright. Well, I guess I'll see you later then," Auklet said. Cliff spread his wings, which Auklet assumed he was going for a hug. But he quickly pulled away before Auklet had a chance to do anything, and he quickly ran off. "Okay. Bye?"

She went into her room, and it was a lot bigger than it looked from the outside. There wasn't much in it, but there was enough room to fit pretty much anything in there. She sat on the bed, and it was way too comfortable. She laid down, and felt her eyes start to droop. *Whoa, that was quick,* she thought drowsily. She laid there for a minute or two, until she drifted off to sleep.

Nothing's happening!

So, someone must have overheard someone mention how Peacemaker was actually created from Darkstalker, because he's been getting a lot of weird looks from NightWings in the rainforest ever since he and Mink got there. If someone did overhear, the news spread very quickly. Peacemaker was almost too afraid to leave the Rain Kingdom because he had no idea if the news had spread to other kingdoms. NightWings were also trying to keep Mink away from Peacemaker, and claim they're trying to "save her from Darkstalker," but she always insisted she was fine.

"No, I'm fine! Peacemaker hasn't done anything to me! No, I'm okay!" Mink has said many times, pushing NightWings away from her. There were many times when Peacemaker had almost snapped at other dragons, but he refrained because that would make things much worse. The only place they could go without being surrounded by NightWings is Peacemaker's home. Even then, dragons keep throwing things through the windows. Mangoes, bananas, papayas, dragonfruits, even occasionally sloths.

And to make matters worse, the NightWings also found out about who Foeslayer actually was. The NightWings have known her as Hope since she moved into the Rain Kingdom. But ever since they found out she was Foeslayer, mother of the evil animus Darkstalker, the NightWings have all turned on her too.

"What do we do!?" Peacemaker panicked.

"I have no idea, just calm down," his mother said.

"Calm down!? How!? Every NightWing wants to kill us! And the worst part is we dragged Mink into this!"

"Don't worry about me. I'm fine," Mink reassured him as a banana flew through the window.

Maybe you should leave the rainforest.

You're not helping!

I just gave you a brilliant idea. How am I not helping?

This is my home! I'm not abandoning it!

Your loss.

All their heads perked up when they heard a knocking at the door.

"Both of you, stay put," Foeslayer said. She went to the door and opened it, and they heard her sigh with relief. "Thank goodness. Come in."

Foeslayer stepped aside and Queen Glory entered.

"Oh! Hello, your highness!" Peacemaker said.

"Alright, I spoke to Queen Thorn, and she says she can set up a homestead where you two can lay low. I sent Deathbringer to the Sky Kingdom to speak to Queen Ruby to see if she's willing to do the same," she said.

Hey, would you look at that. Glory is a lot more sensible than you.

WILL YOU SHUT UP!?

"Thank you. But how will we get there without any NightWings following us?" Foeslayer asked.

"Leave at night. The NightWings will either be asleep, or it'll be too dark to see you. Mink, I think it'd be for the best if you went to the Ice Kingdom," Glory said.

"No, I'm staying with them," Mink said.

"I think it'd be best if you went there, Mink. None of this is your problem," Peacemaker said.

"Let me think about that... No."

"There's no reason for you to be difficult right now. You seriously should go."

"Do you want me to go?"

"No, but it's for the best."

"Oh, well then I'm staying."

She was impossible to argue with. Whenever she made up her mind, you couldn't change it.

"ALRIGHT, you two figure that out. Try to be ready by tonight. I'll take you to the homestead and make sure no one follows," Glory said. They all bowed and she left.

Foeslayer sat down with a sigh, rubbing her temples. Peacemaker sat down beside her, and put a wing around her. "Are you alright?"

She gave him a sad smile. "Yeah. This is just a lot. I'm sorry I didn't tell you sooner. I suppose these past few weeks have been a lot worse for you," she said.

Peacemaker looked over at Mink, who was throwing every piece of fruit that gets thrown through the window back outside.

"It hasn't been that bad. Only my friends and the teachers know. Well... at least, they WERE the only ones who knew. Hey, I'm sure it'll all blow over eventually."

Night fell, and they were ready to leave. Foeslayer was out speaking to Glory, leaving Peacemaker and Mink alone. No fruit had flown through the window in a while, but they heard occasional talking outside. Peacemaker had heard his name a few times, and occasionally Darkstalker's name.

"Are you doing alright?" Mink asked suddenly, making Peacemaker jump slightly. "Sorry! Didn't mean to scare you!" Peacemaker chuckled quietly.

"Yeah, it's just... I never expected to have to leave. To be honest, I never expected any of this. Mink, I'm really sorry you got dragged

into this. I don't want anyone to hurt you just because we're friends," Peacemaker said.

"Hey, stop. It's totally alright. Don't worry about me," Mink said, taking his talon in hers. "We're getting through this together, okay?" She wrapped her wings around him, and he returned the hug, resting his head on her shoulder.

Oh my gosh, I get it! You like each other! Why do I have to be stuck with you of all dragons? Why couldn't it have been some badass dragon who doesn't feel attachments so I don't have to be stuck to your SAPPY BRAIN!?

Peacemaker let out a low growl, and Mink pulled away. "Whoa, you alright?"

"Sorry. Just... Darkstalker," Peacemaker said.

"Then I won't even ask." She smiled at him and he smiled back. They were about to go for another hug, when the door swung open, and Foeslayer came in.

"Alright, we're ready to- am I interrupting something?" She said, stopping mid-sentence.

"N-no! Nothing's happening!" Peacemaker said. Foeslayer raised a brow at him, but decided to dismiss it.

"Alright, let's go. Glory's waiting." They followed her, and Peacemaker looked back one last time at his home before they took off to the Sand Kingdom.

Where's everyone coming from!?

Was it... this way? Bumblebee had decided that instead of going to Pantala to see her parents, she would go to the Sky Kingdom, as a flight to Pantala would take days. They only got a week of break, so that would mean she could only see her parents for a day, and then she'd have to take another long flight back to Pyrrhia. She decided it wasn't worth it.

It can't be that far, right? I've been flying in this direction for hours! Sure enough, she was close! In the distance, she could faintly make out the shape of Queen Ruby's palace. She beat her wings faster, desperate to get there. She needed the rest.

She landed somewhat near the palace in a busy marketplace, SkyWings (and a few other tribes) everywhere chatting, drinking, and eating. She folded her wings in, and the relief she felt from resting them was amazing.

"Have you heard what's happenin' in the Rain Kingdom? Crazy stuff goin' on," a SkyWing said. "Somethin' about an ancient NightWing or somethin' like that."

"What? You actually believe any of that?" Another SkyWing asked.

"Hell, I don't know. Crazy stuffs been happening a lot lately. But knowing the NightWings, it's probably stupid superstitions."

Ancient NightWing? Are they talking about Darkstalker? What's happening with Peacemaker? She decided to let it go, hoping it was just some other ancient NightWing.

She wandered around a bit more, until she heard a SkyWing shouting at his friends, "DID YOU HEAR! DARKSTALKER WAS FOUND INSIDE SOME DRAGONET!!"

"Is there any way you could rephrase that?" One friend asked.

"Um... Darkstalker was found in the head of a dragonet."

"I feel like that's the best we're gonna get."

Oh my gosh, everyone knows. Do Cliff and Auklet know that everyone knows? She ran through the marketplace, constantly hearing Darkstalker's name, and occasionally Peacemaker's name.

She found the entrance to the palace, which was being guarded by two SkyWings. "Um... hi!"

"Halt!" One guard yelled. "What business do you have here!?"

"Sorry, but is Prince Cliff here? He should have come here with a SeaWing," Bumblebee said. The SkyWings gave her a suspicious look.

"Hm. I'll go ask him. Stay here," one guard said, going into the palace. Bumblebee was left alone with the other guard.

They stood there without saying a word for a long while, and Bumblebee was almost convinced she wouldn't get to see Cliff. "So uh... like your job?" Bumblebee asked. The guard she was left with raised a brow at her.

"It has its moments," he answered. As he says this, the other guard comes out.

"You're clear to go in. But if you try anything, you'll be locked away for a long time," he growled.

"Alright, noted," Bumblebee said. She went inside and it was a lot quieter than it was outside.

"BUMBLEBEE!" A familiar voice yelled, making her jump. A red body slammed into her and they fell to the ground. She got a good look at his face and it was Cliff, smiling at her as they stood back up. "What're you doing here!?"

"Pfft this was always my plan! Just wanted to... surprise you!" She

lied. She obviously never planned on coming here.

"Well, I'm always happy to see you! And Auklet would be too!" Cliff said.

"Speaking of which, where is she?"

"Oh, she's in her room! Don't wanna disturb her because I'm pretty sure she's asleep." They started walking and as they went on, Bumblebee said what was on her mind.

"Hey, have you heard about what's going on with Peacemaker?" Cliff nodded.

"Yeah. I leave the palace for five seconds, and I hear three different dragons talking about him," he said. They reached the throne room and Cliff sat down with a sigh. "We should talk to him after the break. Assuming we'll see him, anyway. Things could be really overwhelming for him. Think about how much chaos that's ensuing in the Rain Kingdom."

"Which is why I'm here," a voice said behind Bumblebee. Cliff looked past her, and Bumblebee turned around to find a rather handsome NightWing approaching. "Oh, hello HiveWing. Hello Prince Cliff. I'm Deathbringer, Queen Glory's... bodyguard," he said, giving a slight bow.

"How'd you get past the guards so quickly?" Bumblebee asked.

"They don't know I'm here. And I'd like to keep it that way, thank you very much," Deathbringer said. "Prince Cliff, where may I find Queen Ruby?"

"She's in the Sand Kingdom, talking to Queen Thorn. You'd have better luck there. Sorry," Cliff said. Deathbringer tilted his head in confusion.

"Glory went there the other day, and she never mentioned seeing Ruby there."

"That's because I was on my way back by the time Glory got there," a voice said behind them.

"MOM!" Cliff yelled. He sprang to his feet and gave her a big hug. *How is everyone getting here all at the same time?*

"Deathbringer, how the hell did you get here before me? I was even hurrying back because I knew Cliff would be here," Ruby asked, putting her wings around Cliff. Deathbringer shrugged. She then looked down at Bumblebee. "Hello. You look familiar, have I seen you before?"

"Maybe when I was a baby. About five years ago, I met all the queens in Sanctuary. I don't really remember much about that time though," Bumblebee said. "I'm Bumblebee by the way."

"Well, it's nice to meet you. Deathbringer, why are you here?" Ruby asked. She sat down on her throne, looking as regal as ever.

"Your majesty, there has been chaos in the Rainforest. You may have heard about-"

"Peacemaker?" Ruby interrupted. "Yeah, I heard about it."

"Queen Glory has moved him and his mother to the Sand Kingdom. With your permission, we'd like to use the Sky Kingdom as a back-up in case they get found there," Deathbringer said.

"Yeah, sure. Some dragons can't let go of the past, and they shouldn't suffer because of that," Ruby said.

Oh my gosh, it's worse than I could've imagined! Bumblebee thought. *How's he doing? Is he worried? Is he scared? Is his mother okay?*

"Thank you, your majesty. I will let Queen Glory know right away," Deathbringer said before walking off.

"Oh! Hello your majesty," a voice said. Bumblebee looked back and saw her SeaWing friend standing there, looking slightly drowsy.

"AUKLET!" Bumblebee yelled, tackling her.

"Whoa, alright! Hey Bumblebee. Happy to see you too. Calm down," Auklet said, trying to push Bumblebee off of her, but failed.

"Oh, hello Auklet," Ruby said.

How does Ruby know her? Well, I guess she would know all the heirs.

"Oh yeah. Mother, I invited Auklet here because she didn't feel like going to see her mother because of... uh," Cliff said.

"Yeah, I understand. Sorry you're having to go through all of that Auklet," Ruby said.

"It's alright. The worst part is that she wants to put a leash on me like she did Anemone a few years back. She's overprotective. And, I'm sorry, but she hates SkyWings the most. Mostly because they destroyed the Summer Palace," Auklet said.

"Those weren't my orders," Ruby said.

Auklet shrugged. "She still blames you."

"Do you guys know Peacemaker?" Ruby asked.

"Yeah, he's in our Winglet. He's so sweet. I can't believe all of this is happening to him," Bumblebee said. They sat there talking about whatever was in their mind until Ruby said she was gonna get some sleep. It had just occurred to all of them how late it was. None of them were tired, so after saying goodnight to Ruby, they talked for the rest of the night.

I promise

Mink might be the only IceWing to not mind the heat. Maybe because she spent so much time with Peacemaker in Possibility. Well, her cousin Winter probably doesn't mind the heat that much either. He hasn't been in the Ice Kingdom in a long while.

"Haha! Got it!" Peacemaker shouted triumphantly. He held up a small, brown gecko by the tail. It squirmed around, trying to get loose, but eventually gave up. "For you, m'lady," he said, handing it to her.

She laughed, taking it from him. "Why don't you just eat it for yourself?" She asked.

"I'm a vegetarian! I thought I told you," he said.

"What? Since when?" She asked.

"Since always. Why do you think I never try to catch the chickens or cows in the prey center at school?"

"Because you're scared of them?" Mink joked, biting the head off the gecko.

"Oh, shush," Peacemaker said, playfully shoving Mink. They only had one more day of break left, so they're just exploring the desert since Peacemaker and his mother were forced to move to the Sand Kingdom, the hot sun beating down on them. Foeslayer was staying in the hut, probably reading a scroll or something.

"You're in such a good mood right now. What brought that on?" Mink asked, nudging his wing with her own.

Peacemaker shrugged. "I guess I'm always happy spending time with you." He winked at her. Mink sighed, resting her head against his chest. He put his wings around her. She was suddenly hit with a

huge wave of nervousness. "You alright?"

"It's just... I'm worried about you going back to school," she said. "If everyone knows who you are... you might get bullied constantly. Someone might even try to hurt you. Or-" she stopped herself. Peacemaker looked at her gently.

"Or what?" He asked. A few tears started streaming down her face.

"What if someone tries to kill you?" The thought of losing Peacemaker made her want to stay there wrapped in his wings forever. She couldn't lose him.

"Real mood killer," Peacemaker joked. Mink looked up at him and cracked a small smile. "Hey, don't worry about me, okay? You know I can take care of myself."

That wasn't very reassuring. She knew he could take care of himself. But there are a lot of bloodthirsty dragons out there that would stop at nothing to kill him.

"Just... promise me you'll be safe?" She said, holding up a pinkie. Peacemaker smiled and curled his pinkie around hers.

"I promise."

I know this was a short chapter, but I promise the next one will me much longer ;)

Not a very private place for a murder

"I love you," Peacemaker said, hugging his mother.

"I love you too, sweetheart," she said. "Be safe, you two."

Mink waved goodbye and Foeslayer waved back as they took off.

Listen to her please. I don't wanna die because of your dumb ass.

What if someone slits my throat in my sleep? Don't have much control over that.

Or you could not sleep.

Yeah. I guess that's an option.

Peacemaker and Darkstalker started talking for awhile. He had the nerve to admit that some of the things Darkstalker said were pretty funny, even if they were really inappropriate. He even found a joke against IceWings somewhat funny even though it included that slur he tends to use against them, which made Peacemaker feel bad. Mink kept looking at him whenever he laughed.

"Extra giggly today, aren't you," she said.

"Hm? What? Yeah, sorry. Just... thinking," Peacemaker said.

"Funny thoughts?"

"Uh, yeah. Sure." He wasn't really listening. He was focused on what Darkstalker was saying.

Hey, um... do you hate Mink?

Hm. I guess I don't hate her. But I definitely don't like her.

She's kind of in the middle. I suppose if I ever make another plague to kill IceWings, I could spare her like I did with her cousin. But I wouldn't spare him again. I'd kill him first.

Damn, okay. A bit morbid, isn't it?

Eh, couldn't really care less. Most IceWings are assholes, and deserve to die. Remember Silver? He'll probably try to kill you as soon as you get there.

Haha, yeah. But I'm not really worried. There's teachers there.

"Are you okay? You're being pretty quiet," Mink said suddenly.

"Hm? Oh, yeah. I'm fine. Don't worry about me," he responded, grinning at her, but she didn't grin back.

She thinks she probably did something wrong. Maybe reassure her so we don't have to go through any unnecessary drama.

"Seriously, I'm okay." He bumped her side lightly. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I'm fine. I was just worried about you," she said. "You keep going from laughter to quiet to laughter to quiet and it's kinda weird."

"Maybe mind your own business," he suddenly blurted out.

"Alright, jeez." Mink looked down at the ground far below them.

I- I didn't mean to say that! Darkstalker, help me!

No, you dug your own grave. Might as well jump in.

Come on Darkstalker! You're supposed to be my wingman! No pun intended.

Alright, just for that, I'm not helping you.

Alright, screw you.

"Sorry about that! It just slipped out. I know that's not really an excuse, but I'm sorry," he said. Mink looked at him, then back down

at the ground.

They were silent the rest of the flight. Thankfully, Jade Mountain wasn't far, as the Sand Kingdom was right next to the large mountain. It was crowded, with dragons hugging each other or just having normal (or maybe not normal, Peacemaker didn't know) conversations.

"Hey, are you gonna ignore me the rest of the day?" He asked as they landed.

Mink sighed. "No," she said, giving a small smile. "I can't really stay mad at you, no matter how hard I try." She pressed her head against his.

"I'm sure you can. You just don't try," he said, smiling. As they walked through the school, everyone started staring at Peacemaker, which he expected. However, it still made him uncomfortable. Having dozens of pairs of eyes watching him just as he was walking down a hall.

They eventually found some familiar friendly faces. "Hey Cliff," Peacemaker said. The halls were silent right now, everyone still staring at him.

"Hey," Cliff said. "Auklet and Bumblebee will be here soon. They told me to get a head start so I got here before them because they were taking forever to get ready." Mink hugged him, and quickly pulled away, as the countless eyes made her uneasy too, along with the silence.

"Move! Out of the way!" Peacemaker turned around and was immediately pinned against the wall by his neck, white claws putting him in a chokehold.

"Silver, let him go!" Mink yelled. Silver didn't let go. If anything, he squeezed harder.

"I might as well kill you right here!" Silver shouted in Peacemaker's face.

"This isn't the most private place for a murder," Peacemaker choked

out. Mink tried pulling him away, but Silver easily pushed her back. He even went as far as to dig his claws into his neck, blood trickling down his neck. Everything eventually started going blurry. Just as he thought he was gonna die, a brown blur easily yanked Silver away from him. Peacemaker fell to the ground, gasping and coughing. Everything started to refocus, and he could see Clay dragging Silver away. Mink and Cliff got on both sides of him to help Peacemaker up. His neck was still leaking blood.

"You should go see Clay about that," Cliff said.

"No, it's fine," Peacemaker said.

"Peacemaker, stop," Mink said. "There's literally *no* reason at all why you shouldn't get help."

He did have his reasons. One of them being that he was currently dragging Silver away. He could hear Silver's roars echoing throughout the hall. There were murmurs from students and Peacemaker was glad some of the attention was dragged away from him.

Another reason being that Peacemaker didn't like bothering other dragons. He knew Clay wouldn't mind, but he always felt bad interrupting others from doing things they could be doing instead of having to deal with him.

But as he felt more pain rising in his neck and felt blood spilling out, he realized he might not have much of a choice.

Suddenly, a wet, warm rag pressed against his neck wounds. Peacemaker jumped back, not expecting it. He turned and saw Moon holding the rag.

"Calm down, it's just me," she said, gently pressing the rag to his neck again. The warmth was somewhat soothing. "I'll try to make sure no one attacks you. Might be kinda difficult because you're currently the most famous dragon in the entire continent right now. So now you have all the teachers as your 'bodyguards.'"

Oh, great. Moon is gonna be watching you 24/7 now. Which

means I can't talk freely anymore. Fantastic.

At least I won't die.

If I don't have freedom of speech, I might as well be dead.

Moon rolled her eyes, and moved to the other side of his neck.

"Alright, everyone go to your caves! Stop staring so much!" They turned around to see Tsunami and Sunny. "You two are fine," Tsunami muttered to Moon and Peacemaker. All the other students started scurrying in every direction to find their sleeping caves.

"Don't worry Peacemaker," Sunny said. "We'll make sure nothing happens to you."

That wasn't very reassuring. Now he was worried he was putting their lives at risk too.

"Don't worry about us, okay?" Moon said, smiling at him. But he was worried. He was worrying a lot. No one should have to get themselves killed for his sake. "Really. Don't worry," she said again, putting her hand on his shoulder. She pulled the rag away. He could see it was stained with his blood.

You need to start thinking about yourself more. I'm not dying because you're so 'incredibly selfless.'

I don't care. I'm gonna make sure no one gets killed just for me.

You get used to it

Bumblebee and Auklet arrived later that day, but it was excused because there weren't any classes on the first day back. Cliff asked why they took so long, and their response was, "we just felt like it."

So Cliff let it go. It wasn't his business. As the days went on, Peacemaker was still getting bullied by the other students. Mainly the NightWings and IceWings. And ESPECIALLY Silver. He didn't get expelled, which surprised everyone. Instead, he's being watched intensely by the teachers. Whenever they were in a class with him, Peacemaker always sat on the other side of the classroom as him. Silver had left scars on his neck

Speaking of Peacemaker, there have been moments when Peacemaker would randomly snap at them. He never means to, but it always slips out. He always feels really bad whenever he does it, and says about a thousand apologies. Mink always comforts him, telling him it's okay, and then hugging him. By the way, they hugged a LOT now. Cliff initially thought it was adorable, until they started doing it EVERY MINUTE. He understood they were friends (very close friends, at that), but they didn't need to hug that often.

Cliff still had a big crush on Auklet though. And he felt like a hypocrite because he would love to be hugged by Auklet.

Cliff sat in the library without his friends, reading a scroll. It wasn't anything interesting. He just wanted an excuse to be alone for a bit, lost in his thoughts. He wasn't even reading the scroll.

"CLIFF!" Cliff's head shot up from the scroll, startled. He saw Bumblebee bounding towards him.

"Hey Bumblebee. How're you?" Cliff asked calmly.

"I'm doing great! It's so sunny outside right now! The warmth feels amazing! Pantala never gets *this* warm!" She said.

"Uh... yeah. Just wait until summer time. It can get pretty hot around here," he said. He was slightly annoyed that Bumblebee came in because he was enjoying the peace and quiet. But he didn't have the heart to ask her to leave. "Where're the others?"

"No idea where Auklet is. But Peacemaker and Mink are in the prey center. I decided to leave them to their little 'date,'" she said.

"Date? Are they-?"

"Um... no, I don't think so. But that'd be cute, right? Peacemaker would clearly be very caring for her, as would Mink." She was right. Peacemaker would be perfect for Mink. "What about you? Have you tried talking to Auklet?"

Cliff shook his head. He wasn't really the best at this subject. Bumblebee was the only one he told about his crush on Auklet. However, he was pretty sure Peacemaker and Mink had already figured it out.

"Well, would you like me to tell her?" Cliff shook his head quickly.

"Nonono! I'll tell her someday. Just... not right now," he said. He really didn't want to tell her at all. He could tell she didn't feel the same way.

A few students wandered in, and then wandered back out. This was something that happened quite often to Cliff, Auklet, and Bumblebee. They assumed it was because they were friends with Peacemaker, so they wanted to avoid them. But whenever they actually saw Peacemaker, they'd shove him as they walked past him, or even go as far as to actually hurt him. But it was always immediately put to a stop by a teacher.

Cliff sighed. "Do you like anyone?" He asked.

Bumblebee thought for a second before she spoke. "No, not really. All the other students here are rude to my friends, so I don't like them."

A SkyWing walked in, but didn't seem to even care that Cliff and Bumblebee were in there. She saw them, and even seemed to

recognize them. Cliff recognized her as Gale, a very nice SkyWing whom Cliff may have had a crush on once.

"Hey Cliff!" She said cheerfully. She looked at Bumblebee. "You're... Bumblebee, right?"

"Yep!" Bumblebee said, smiling. Gale inspected her wings.

"I've never gotten to see HiveWing wings up close before! Normally, HiveWings avoid me because I'm 'too social' and they don't wanna talk to me." She lightly tapped one of Bumblebee's wings, but quickly pulled away, probably worried she'll rip it. Bumblebee held out her left two wings, wordlessly telling Gale she could touch them.

"Yeah, but it's not their fault. They grew up with crappy parents who were under Queen Wasp's control. I never got controlled and my parents didn't either. Well, my father did for a few days, but that got sorted out pretty quickly," Bumblebee explained.

"Your parents are Blue and Cricket, right?" Cliff asked.

"Yeah. They adopted me after they couldn't find my real parents. But they treat me a millions times better than all the other HiveWings' parents do."

"Well, I'm happy for you," Gale said. "My parents have told me I'm better off dead."

"Aww! Well, I'm glad you're alive!" Bumblebee said, pulling her into a hug. Bumblebee was always good at making dragons feel better. That's something Cliff really liked about her. Gale blushed a bit, not expecting the hug, but seemed to enjoy it as she smiled a bit.

"I've never been hugged by four wings before," Gale said.

"You get used to it," Cliff said. Cliff rather liked being hugged by four wings. It was comforting. It felt like two dragons were there for you, even if there was only one.

"Bumblebee, your scales are b-" Gale got cut off by a sudden loud scream. It made all of them jump, and Starflight's ears perked up.

They all heard a student scream, "IT'S BLACKICE!! EVERYONE RUUUN!!"

History doesn't change

Peacemaker sat down, staring at the mango he had on the stone table in front of him. Mink insisted that he should eat it because he had eaten hardly anything in the past few days.

"Eat, or else I'll shove the whole thing down your throat," Mink said nonchalantly.

"I'm not hungry," he said, not looking up from the mango. It rolled around a bit, but Peacemaker kept stopping it from rolling off the table.

"You've said that every time I throw food at you," she said. She sat beside him and put her wing around him. He still didn't look up. "What did I do? Did I upset you?"

"No. I'm just not hungry," Peacemaker said.

"Look at you two, arguing like an old married couple." Peacemaker and Mink turned around and saw Silver grabbing a chicken by the neck. "Better watch out, Mink. He's got a dragon who would be an abusive boyfriend inside his head. And he has the genes of an abusive father."

I never abused Clearsight. However, he was right about my father.

"What is your beef with me? I never did anything to you," Peacemaker said.

"Alright, where do I begin? Your mother stole Prince Arctic from the IceWings, she laid Darkstalker's egg, he made Indigo disappear, he made himself immortal, he brainwashed Clearsight, he murdered his father in front of the entire NightWing tribe, he almost killed Clearsight! When he came back out of the mountain, he brainwashed the ENTIRE CONTINENT, and sent a plague out for the IceWings, killing Queen Glacier, lots of other IceWings,

including my mother!"

Well... he exaggerated some of it.

Did he though?

Kinda?

"We're sorry about your mother, but Peacemaker had nothing to do with any of that," Mink said.

"Why are you defending him!? He killed your mother too!" Silver shot back. Mink sighed, looking down.

"Silver, Mink doesn't like talking about that," Peacemaker said, putting a wing around her.

"Why do you care? You hate IceWings."

"No, I don't! Darkstalker and I are NOT the same dragon!"

"But, that's just it! You two ARE the same dragon. Whether you like it or not, you two are literally the same dragon!" They stopped for a second when they heard a distant scream. They didn't think anything of it because there was a SandWing student who yelled and/or screamed at random intervals.

"We're NOT the SAME!" Peacemaker shoved Silver back, and he punched Peacemaker square in the face. He stumbled back, not expecting it at all. It didn't hurt as much as he thought it would, though. Blood started pouring out his nose.

"Silver!" Mink yelled. She shoved him back too, and Silver didn't do anything back to her. "Get out, or get lost! I don't wanna see you anywhere near Peacemaker!"

Silver scowled at her, and turned to leave. When he reached the doorway, he got pushed back by a taller dragon, knocking him over. He looked like a NightWing/IceWing hybrid. He looked weirdly familiar. But Peacemaker couldn't remember his name at all. He had a cape that draped over his left shoulder. It didn't even go across his back. Peacemaker suspected it wasn't just an accessory. He also had

a large satchel on his chest.

"Get up, IceWing," he said. Silver stood up and gasped.

"Holy shit! You're BlackIce!" Peacemaker gasped. He knew that name! He was wanted all over the continent. Whenever he hunted for a dragon, he always succeeded. Not once had he ever failed.

"Calm down, I'm not after you," he said, pointing to Silver. "I'm after that asshole." He pointed at Peacemaker. His heart suddenly sank.

I'm gonna die I'm gonna die I'm gonna die!

Calm down! Maybe try to talk him out of it. Your negotiation skills are laughable, but it could be enough.

"No! You'll have to kill me too!" Mink said.

BlackIce sighed. "Look, your highness. I don't need there to be any unnecessary casualties. Don't make this difficult, please." Mink didn't move. She didn't even look scared. However, she trembled slightly. "Come one, I said 'please.' I thought that was enough for dumb dragonets like yourselves."

BlackIce suddenly flinched, like he got hit by something. He turned around and Tsunami, Moon and Clay were there.

"Ah, I was wondering where the teachers were. I was actually concerned the students here weren't getting anything done." BlackIce said. "Moonwatcher, good to finally meet you. You were my target for a while, but you kept hanging out with that dopey SandWing, so I eventually gave up."

Moon growled at him, and BlackIce raised a brow at her. "I thought BlackIce never failed to kill anyone," Tsunami mocked.

"Never actually attempted to kill her. I watched her for a while to see if I could catch her alone. But she never was. Whether she was with Qibli or Winter or any of your other friends. I try not to kill more dragons than I have to," he explained.

"Leave the school, BlackIce!" Clay said. "It's three versus one. You're

outnumbered."

"Oh no, you're right. If only I had brought backup with me to the most guarded school on the continent. I'm so scared right now."

"Alright, shut up. Where are the others? You made it very obvious there are-" Moon cut herself off, and looked to her left.

"What is it?" Tsunami asked.

"DUCK!" Moon shouted. A blast of fire shot over their heads. A rather skinny SkyWing slammed into Moon's side, knocking her into Tsunami and Clay.

"Jet, I told you to wait for a signal," BlackIce said.

"I got bored. Coldsnap is an asshole, and I didn't wanna deal with his bullshit anymore," the SkyWing said.

Might be too late for negotiations.

Maybe not.

"Look, no one has to die for me! You can kill me, just don't hurt anyone!" Peacemaker said.

WHAT THE HELL!! THAT'S NOT WHAT I HAD IN MIND AT ALL! I WAS SAYING I DIDN'T WANT TO DIE!

"Oh, good. That makes things a lot easier. Jet, can you set off some sort of signal to get the others in here?" BlackIce said.

"No! Peacemaker, don't do this!" Mink yelled. Silver looked too mortified to speak.

"Mink, I'm not letting anyone get killed for me."

"Ooh! BlackIce, got any cacti on ya?" Jet asked. BlackIce reached into his satchel and pulled out a cactus. He handed it to Jet. "Try not to kill anyone with it."

"No promises!" Jet yelled as he darted past Moon, Tsunami and Clay

and went through the hall.

BlackIce turned to Peacemaker, Mink and Silver. "Might as well get comfortable. Gotta wait for the others to get here." Tsunami lunged at him, but BlackIce simply stepped aside, and she missed. "You didn't actually think that would work, did you?"

Peacemaker looked at Moon, who was writing something on a worn-out piece of parchment. He wasn't sure where she pulled that out from, but she must be doing something important. When she was done, she rolled it back up.

BlackIce kept dodging any of Tsunami's attacks. "Look, I'm not here for you. And I don't wanna kill you. So please don't give me a reason to." Clay lunged at him too. He actually managed to pin him to the ground. "Alright, big guy. This isn't necessary." They were interrupted by a loud explosion that made Clay get off of him. Peacemaker could hear his ears ringing a bit. "Dammit, Jet better not have killed anyone."

Try to stall him or something.

"Um... why does it matter to you if you kill others beside your target?" Peacemaker asked.

"Makes things inconvenient. I'll kill others if I have to, not because I want to," he explained.

"Peacemaker, what about the others? Do you think they're okay?" Mink asked him. That was a good point. He knew Cliff and Bumblebee were in the library and Auklet was in Webs' history room studying. But what if the explosion killed one of them?

"BlackIce, do you really trust Jet to not kill anyone?" Clay asked.

"He's a lot older than he looks and acts. He knows what he's doing." Another explosion went off, but it sounded more distant. Mink suddenly wrapped her wings around Peacemaker gently.

This was an odd feeling to him. It felt really weird to think that he was going to die today. His mother taught him not to be afraid of death. He felt Mink sobbing into his chest, which almost made him

want to cry. Anytime she cried, he had to hold it back so he could comfort her. But he felt like it didn't matter at this point.

"Oh, quit your whining," BlackIce said. "You'll probably be happy when he's dead. No more stress for you."

"I don't care! I love him! I wouldn't give him up for the whole world!" Mink protested. Did he hear her correctly?

"Mink? Did you-"

"We'll talk about it another time, okay?"

"Well, there might not be another time."

"HOLY SHIT, SHUT UP!! I get it, you love each other! The whole continent doesn't need to know about it!" BlackIce yelled.

He's got a point.

Who's side are you on?

Not yours! You're letting him kill us!

I don't want any innocent dragons getting killed just for me!

"Look, I don't care that you like each other. Just... do it on the other side of the room from me," BlackIce said.

Suddenly, a SandWing barreled into Moon, pinning her down to the ground.

"Hello, Moonwatcher. How's your boyfriend?" She asked.

"Rattlesnake?" Moon asked, slightly muffled as her head was pressed to the ground.

"Rattlesnake! No killing!" BlackIce shouted.

"This one's dating my stupid brother! Can't we have some exceptions?" She asked.

BlackIce shook his head, and Rattlesnake growled under her breath.

She was followed by Jet, an IceWing, a HiveWing, a MudWing, and a RainWing. Rattlesnake got off Moon. The MudWing and IceWing pulled Peacemaker from Mink and pinned him to the wall. The HiveWing held Tsunami back, and the RainWing surprisingly held Clay back, and Jet held Moon back.

"Peacemaker!" Someone shouted from the doorway. Rattlesnake turned around and saw Auklet standing there. She grabbed her and held her the way the others were holding everyone else. "Mink, do something!"

"Like what!? There's seven of them!"

Silver sat in the corner, just watching. He was too mortified to do anything.

"BlackIce, Peacemaker didn't do anything! Dragons change, and he's living proof that they can literally change!" Moon shouted.

"Yeah, dragons *do* change. But you know what doesn't? History. History does NOT change! And why do we *learn* history? So it doesn't repeat itself! And I'm here to make sure that doesn't happen! This'll make the world a much safer place with no threat of the Great Darkstalker coming back from the dead again!"

"Yeah, feel much safer already," Tsunami said. The HiveWing sliced at Tsunami's chest, drawing a significant amount of blood.

Mink tried pulling BlackIce away, but he pushed her to the ground. "Coldsnap, hold her," he said. The IceWing let go of Peacemaker, leaving only the MudWing to hold him. He held onto Mink, and made her watch what BlackIce was going to do to Peacemaker. He held a large, wide knife to Peacemaker's throat.

Well, it was nice knowing you, Darkstalker!

Yeah. Fantastic.

Come on, no parting words for me?

Sure. Screw you.

"STOP!" Everyone turned to the doorway to see a tall NightWing standing there. Peacemaker knew immediately who it was.

"Mom?"

"Foeslayer! So glad you could join us!" BlackIce said, smiling. "I was actually gonna go visit you when we were done."

"It's me you want. I'm the one who married Prince Arctic. I started all of it. If it weren't for me, none of the horrible stuff would have happened. Kill me instead," she said.

"No! Mom, don't!" Peacemaker yelled.

"Or I could... y'know... kill you both," BlackIce said.

"Do you really wanna kill a dragonet who's a lot more innocent than either of us? He never did anything wrong. It was Darkstalker. Not him. Please spare him."

BlackIce shrugged. He lunged the knife at Peacemaker. He closed his eyes, getting ready for whatever pain was coming his way, but it never did. He opened his eyes, and saw his pinning BlackIce to the ground in a chokehold, his knife by his tail. BlackIce slashed at his mother's stomach. She tried to act like it wasn't hurting her, but Peacemaker could always tell when she was fibbing.

Peacemaker tried thrashing, but the MudWing was a lot stronger than he was. He tried to scratch at the MudWing the same way BlackIce was, but he barely even tore through the scales.

Well, if I can't get through the scales...

Peacemaker took a deep breath, getting himself ready for what he was about to do. He thrusted a claw straight into the MudWing's eye, causing him to let him go and roar in pain. He looked at his claw, and it was coated in the MudWing's blood.

"Haha! Nice one!" Tsunami shouted.

He tried get away from the MudWing, but Jet instinctively grabbed him by the throat as he passed him, choking him a lot harder than

Silver had. But in the process, he let go of Moon. She immediately smacked her tail in Jet, making him stumble into the MudWing, who was still on the ground, writhing with pain, one of his talons pressed against his eye. Jet fell over the MudWing, almost comically.

"Go, get out of here!" Moon yelled to Peacemaker as she slashed at the RainWing holding Clay, drawing a lot of blood. The RainWing roared, spraying venom directly at Moon. She didn't move fast enough, but luckily, it only hit her elbow. Clay broke free and hit the HiveWing holding Tsunami. This caused the HiveWing to slash Tsunami's chest even more.

Wh- what do I do!?

Run, you idiot!

But... my friends-

Who cares!? Get the hell outta there!

I- I can't leave my mother or my friends!

Yes you can! Because I'm not dying for them just because you're so selfless!

Peacemaker growled as he saw them free Mink and Auklet. No, he couldn't leave them. He saw the HiveWing try to lunge at Mink, but Peacemaker tackled her. He wasn't going to let anyone hurt her.

"Peacemaker, I told you to run!" Moon shouted. The HiveWing easily kicked him off of her. She was about to stab Peacemaker with her tail, but he saw fire blast her in the back. The HiveWing fell onto him. She wasn't dead, but she was unconscious.

Peacemaker looked over to his mother. He could see her grip loosen, and her stomach completely coated in blood. BlackIce eventually managed to kick Foeslayer off him. He reached for the knife, and without hesitation, stabbed it deep into his mother's stomach.

We're not breaking that promise

Everyone went silent. Everyone stopped moving. Peacemaker looked on in horror at what just happened.

Nonononono NOOO!

"Alright. We're leaving," BlackIce said with a sigh, getting up.

"Wait, what about Peacemaker? We could easily kill him," Snakeroot said.

"No. We'll give him a few days, and then we'll see him again. Let him feel the pain of what happened. Like a new form of torture." Peacemaker growled loudly and pounced on BlackIce, clawing at his neck and face. The Mudwing kicked him off of BlackIce, but Peacemaker went for him again. This time, the MudWing pinned him against the wall, blood pouring out of his eye. "Thanks Landslide." He looked at Mink for a split second before shaking his head and leaving the prey center. He was followed by everyone else, with Landslide being last and Snakeroot growling under his breath. The others didn't move. Even Clay and Tsunami stood still. But as soon as Landslide let Peacemaker go and started dragging the HiveWing, he bolted for BlackIce again, but Moon stopped him.

"NO! LET ME GO MOON!" He shouted. He scratched the burnt spot on Moon's elbow, making her flinch in pain and let him go. He bolted down the hall for BlackIce, but Coldsnap slammed him against the wall.

"Someone's real eager to die, BlackIce," he said. BlackIce looked over at Peacemaker.

"Listen. I'm doing you a favor by sparing you for now. The least you could do is leave me alone," he said.

"NO! YOU SHOULD HAVE KILLED ME WHEN YOU HAD THE CHANCE!"

"Well... I have the chance right now. And as you can see, I'm not killing you. And I think you know I won't. Your mother deserved what she got, and hell, I might spare you all together because I pity you." He nodded at Coldsnap and he let Peacemaker go. "Now, if you stop following us, I won't have to hurt you anymore. Understood?" Peacemaker didn't respond. Instead, he tried slashing at BlackIce. He knew it wasn't a good idea, but he didn't care.

BlackIce grabbed his arm and bent it until they heard a loud snap. Peacemaker roared in pain. "I warned you, dumbass," BlackIce said. They turned to leave and Peacemaker finally gave up. He sat against the wall, grasping his broken arm.

"Peacemaker?" He looked to his right and saw Cliff, Bumblebee, and another SkyWing. "Hey uh... you look like shit. They didn't kill you?"

"They should have," he muttered.

"There was a crazy explosion! We thought they were gonna kill us all!" Bumblebee said.

"Come on, we'll get you to Clay," Cliff said. He held out a talon to help him up. Peacemaker stood, and Cliff and Bumblebee got on either side of him for support.

"No." Peacemaker said. "Prey Center."

"Peacemaker, your arm-" Bumblebee started.

"I know! But that's the least of my problems right now. Just... please." Cliff shared a glance with Bumblebee, and sighed. They started helping him walk. It was a lot more difficult than he thought it'd be.

Darkstalker? Are you there?

No answer.

Please. I need someone to talk to. Please.

Well, I don't wanna talk to you. All of this is your fault. If Moon wasn't busy saving your sorry ass, she could have helped Foeslayer. But instead, you didn't run. Running wouldn't have made you a coward, Peacemaker. It would've been the smart thing to do.

One part kept repeating in Peacemaker's head. *It's my fault it's my fault it's my fault.*

"Hey, man. You alright?" The other SkyWing asked. Peacemaker recognized her as Gale. She was unfathomably kind to everyone. It had just occurred to Peacemaker that he had started crying. He didn't respond to her, or even look up at her. He kept staring at the ground the whole time.

"Whoa. What the hell happened here?" Bumblebee said. Peacemaker looked up and saw they reached the Prey Center, the ground stained with blood. He saw Clay cleaning Tsunami's bloodstained chest, a white bandage wrapped tightly around Moon's elbow, Sunny was there now, Silver wasn't there anymore, and he saw the thing Peacemaker was dreading seeing: his mother's body.

"Peacemaker!" Mink yelled. He felt a cold body pressing against him. Her wings were wrapped around him, and her face was slightly wet, probably from crying. She looked at his arm and then up at him. "I'm so, so sorry."

Cliff saw Auklet, and he let go of Peacemaker to go talk to her. Bumblebee and Gale followed. Peacemaker slowly limped to his mother. Her eyes were still open, but glazed over. He suppressed the urge to vomit. Not because of all the blood, but the thought that he just lost his mother forever had finally hit him. He knelt down at her head, and rested his working arm on her chest.

His eyesight was completely blurry at this point, tears starting to stream down his face. He moved his arm to the side of her neck. Mink still had a wing around him, probably crying too. Peacemaker reached for Foeslayer's eyes and closed them. It was at that moment when he lost it. He started sobbing into Mink's shoulder, and she

put her other wing around him too.

"Mink, I'm sorry," Peacemaker said.

"What for?"

"I'm sorry you got dragged into this. You shouldn't have to deal with this. And I-"

"Stop. This wasn't your fault. You had no idea it would happen." He felt Mink look up, and Peacemaker assumed someone came in.

"Oh no," came a mutter from the doorway. Peacemaker still didn't look up, but he recognized his voice as Qibli. Peacemaker had always liked Qibli. He was always unbelievably kind to him."Hey bud," he said, crouching down beside him.

"Where's he gonna go? I don't know if his hut in the Sand Kingdom will be safe for him anymore," Mink said, wiping some tears away.

"Yeah, I know. And the Rain Kingdom is the most obvious place for him to be. I could try to get Queen Thorn to let him stay in her stronghold. It's well guarded."

"Yeah, but that's never stopped BlackIce. On his own, he could get past all the guards and kill him," Cliff said.

"Maybe he could stay in the Ice Kingdom?" Mink suggested.

"He wouldn't survive in the cold for long," Auklet said.

"Well, the Sky Kingdom is open," Cliff suggested.

"Ha! Yeah, too open! BlackIce could kill him and it'd take forever to find his body," Tsunami said. Clay suddenly pressed into Tsunami's bleeding chest hard, causing her flinch in pain. "What was that for!?" Clay only looked up at her and shook his head.

"Y'know, somehow that didn't make me feel better," Peacemaker mumbled.

"I'd suggest the Sea Kingdom, but mother would be pissed," Auklet

said. Tsunami nodded.

"She'd freak out," she said.

"You could go to the Mud Kingdom. My siblings would be more than happy to keep you safe," Clay suggested.

"No, I can't put your siblings in danger. I know how much they mean to you," Peacemaker said, finally looking up to everyone. Everyone was looking at him which made him want to bury his head in Mink's shoulder again.

"Ooh! What about Pantala?" Bumblebee suggested.

"If BlackIce can't figure out I'm in Pantala, he'll look for all of you, and torture you to get to me. And if you don't tell him anything, he'll kill you," Peacemaker said.

As the others discussed where Peacemaker could live, the words Darkstalker had said were repeating in his head over and over again. *It's my fault it's my fault it's MY FAULT!*

Moon looked in his direction, but didn't say anything. She even agrees with me.

"I'm sure my mother would be more than happy. I feel like her stronghold would be the most secure place for him," Sunny said.

It felt like it was getting harder to breathe. The metallic smell of blood was filling his nose.

He sighed and stood up. "I'm gonna get some air," he muttered and everyone watched him limp out. He limped to wherever everyone landed when they entered the school. The sun was setting and the sky was orange. This was his favorite time of day. Him and his mother used to sit outside and watch the sun set. Recalling those memories made him tear up again. He figured that at this point, he wouldn't be able to think of her ever again without crying.

The school was really quiet. No doubt all the students evacuated when BlackIce came in.

"I did NOT miss that smell." Peacemaker turned around and saw yellow scales approaching. His eyesight was slightly blurry now. He tried wiping his tears away, but it proved ineffective when more tears formed. "I had to endure that smell for MONTHS when Queen Thorn moved into the Stronghold. Burn had a crazy gore fetish and there was blood and dragon heads everywhere."

"Qibli, did Moon tell you who was with BlackIce?" Peacemaker asked. Qibli shook his head. "Your sister Rattlesnake." As he said that, any sort of trace of a smile disappeared on Qibli's face.

"Um... h-how's your arm?" He asked. Peacemaker held his broken arm up, and Qibli inspected it. He gently felt around it, making sure not to hurt Peacemaker. "It's not completely broken. Mostly just dislocated. Want me to snap it back? I haven't done it in awhile, but I'm sure I could get it back to normal."

"Uh- yeah. Sure."

"Alright, this might hurt a bit." He grasped the arm and pulled it in the direction it broke from. Peacemaker winced in pain as it felt like his bones were scraping. He let out a loud cry of pain as it snapped back in place. "How does it feel?"

Peacemaker moved his arm around. He could finally move it without it hurting. Well, that was a lie. It still hurts. But it was better. The bone didn't feel out of place anymore. "Thanks."

"Alright, where do you wanna live? At the end of the day, it's your decision. No matter where you choose, either me or Moon will stay with you," Qibli said.

"Why?"

"When you were very young, we promised your mother that we'd look after you after she passed. We're not breaking that promise." Peacemaker sighed.

"I don't know. Everywhere I go, I'll end up putting dragons at risk. I can't do that to anyone. Especially you and Moon," Peacemaker said. Qibli chuckled softly. He crouched down slightly to be at eye

level.

"Your selflessness is one of my favorite things about you. A trait that always gets overlooked. But you gotta think about yourself every once in a while too. You also matter." Peacemaker gave him a sad smile before wrapping his wings around him. Qibli returned the hug. Peacemaker almost felt like crying again. And he did. "Damn, am I that bad at hugging?" Qibli joked. Peacemaker chuckled quietly. Qibli always knew how to make him laugh, even when he was upset. "Has Darkstalker said anything?" Peacemaker nodded.

"He said um-" Peacemaker stopped, his voice cracking a bit. "He said her death was my fault."

"Aw, Peacemaker. Don't blame yourself. It wasn't you, it was BlackIce," Qibli said.

No, it was one hundred percent your fault.

Why are you like this!? Why do you always have to make things worse!?

Me!? She died because you refused to listen to a simple demand!

Someone else could've helped her! Like Clay or Tsunami!

They were all a bit preoccupied with their own attackers!

Yeah, and so was Moon! And if I didn't do what I did, Mink would've gotten hurt, or even killed!

"You're talking to him, aren't you?" Qibli asked. Peacemaker nodded. "Alright, you should go to your sleeping cave. Your friends will be there with you. And since you're currently the only students who are still at this school right now, your cave is gonna be guarded. But not closely. Don't wanna make you guys uncomfortable."

Peacemaker nodded and they began walking to his cave. Well, Qibli was walking. Peacemaker was still limping slightly. As they passed the now empty Prey Center, Peacemaker stopped. No one was in

there anymore, not even his mother. There was still blood staining the ground.

"You can see your mother tomorrow. They'll be moving her body to the Rain Kingdom for a proper grave," Qibli said. Peacemaker sighed and nodded. They reached his sleeping cave where Mink was pacing, Cliff and Auklet were talking quietly, and Bumblebee was asleep.

"Peacemaker!" Mink said, hugging him. "Are you alright?"

"Yeah, I'm okay. Are you guys alright?" Mink nodded.

"I'll see you guys in the morning," Qibli said, leaving.

"Your arm okay?" Cliff asked.

"It's better." He held it up and moved it around slightly. "Still hurts a bit."

"Hey, if you ever need to talk, we're here for you," Auklet said.

"Thank you. I'm gonna get some sleep. It's been a very long and painful day," Peacemaker said, hopping into his bed. Despite what he said, he was awake all night. Even while Mink was curled up against him, and with Darkstalker being silent, he knew it was gonna be a very long night.

It Finally Happened

It had been a month since everything happened. The students came back a few days after the teachers reassured everyone it's alright. BlackIce and his "goons" had never come back, so they assumed it was gonna be okay. Silver and all the other students stopped bullying Peacemaker. In fact, they were a lot nicer to him now. Well, Silver just didn't speak to him. But that was a step up. But Peacemaker was more depressed than Mink had ever seen him. He spoke quietly, he kept his head down most of the time, he got almost no sleep, he ate almost nothing, and there were times when he would randomly break down. And Mink was there for every single one of those moments, trying to comfort him. He also didn't go to his classes very much, but the teachers allowed it.

By the way, they never brought up what Mink said to BlackIce. Mink wanted to, but she also didn't want to make Peacemaker uncomfortable. And she felt it wasn't a good time for that.

Peacemaker had decided to live in Queen Thorn's Stronghold. He was welcomed with open wings by all the SandWings there. Qibli primarily took care of him, and Moon did whenever Qibli wasn't able to. But all the SandWings were really nice to him. Mink, Moon and Queen Glory were the only ones who were really allowed to visit him.

"Hey, how're you doing?" Mink asked. Peacemaker was laying in his bed, reading a scroll in his sleeping cave. He didn't answer. "Peacemaker?"

His head looked away from his scroll. "Hey." He set it down and sat up. He had bags under his eyes, indicating he hadn't slept in awhile.

"When was the last time you got good sleep?" Mink asked, sitting down beside him.

"Who keeps track of that?" Peacemaker said.

"You should be. If you're not careful, I might tranq you with a RainWing blow dart," Mink said. Peacemaker smiled and rested his head on her shoulder. Mink's heart was pounding hard as he did this.

"I would appreciate that."

Okay, maybe I could try talking to him now. "Peacemaker?"

"Yeah?"

"I- I just... this isn't an easy thing to ask. Things like this have always been really difficult to talk about for me because I'm afraid of messing it up," she said.

Peacemaker looked her in the eyes. "It's alright. Take your time."

"I uh- I lo-"

"Peacemaker! How're you? I haven't seen you sit up in awhile!" Bumblebee entered the room, happy as ever.

"Yeah. Guess I'm feeling slightly better today," he said, looking at Mink.

Bumblebee gasped. "Did I interrupt something!? I'm so sorry, I'll leave!"

"No, it's alright. Don't worry about it. It... wasn't important," Mink said. "You're in a good mood. What's up?"

"It's just beautiful out today! Why wouldn't I be in a good mood?" Bumblebee said excitedly. "Also, Gale is my favorite dragon now. Look what she bought me in Possibility!" Mink held up a small, beautifully woven tapestry of what looked like Jade Mountain.

"Aww, that's really sweet of her!" Mink said.

"Alright, I'm gonna go show this to everyone else! Buh-bye!" Bumblebee skipped away.

"You were saying?" Peacemaker said, looking back at Mink. She

took a deep breath before speaking.

"I love you. I'm tired of bottling it up for so long. I would've said something sooner, but you've been so depressed lately, and I didn't want to make you uncomfortable or anxious because I care about you very deeply. And I know how mushy this all sounds, but it's true. Just seeing your face everyday is enough to make each day amazing, and-" Mink was cut off by Peacemaker's snout pressing against hers. Not really a kiss, but more of an affectionate gesture.

"Love you too," he said, smiling. This was the first time she's seen him genuinely smile in a month, and it was a beautiful sight. She twined her tail around his and rested her head against his. "Didn't need to be that sappy though. A simple 'I love you, we're dating now' would've been fine with me."

Mink giggled. "Such low standards."

"Hey, I've had a crush on you for over a year now. I don't think it matters to me at this point," he said. *A year? He's really liked me for that long?* "So, what now? Am I supposed to just drop down and give you a dragonet?"

Mink laughed. "I hope not! We're way too young for that. And even if we were older, that'd be a hard 'maybe.'"

"Alright, fair enough," Peacemaker said, chuckling.

"Well, here's what *you're* gonna do. You're gonna eat something because you look like you haven't eaten in a year. And then you're gonna get some sleep, because you look like you haven't slept in even longer."

Peacemaker smile faded. "You know I don't like going to the Prey Center anymore, Mink."

"Then let me get you food. Look, if you're gonna die, don't let it be from starvation or sleep deprivation." She kissed his cheek and left for the Prey Center. She ran into other students a few times, but she didn't stop until she reached the Prey Center. All the blood was gone, there were students happily chatting as they ate whatever

they got.

"Hey, Mink!" Mink whipped her head around to see Cliff. "Have you asked him yet?"

"Yep! Went great!" Mink smiled. She had initially told Cliff that she wanted to tell Peacemaker how she felt.

"Nice! I'm happy for you!"

"Any luck with Auklet?" Cliff shook his head.

"Asking her isn't even the hard part. I'm... scared of being in a relationship. I'm scared of the responsibility, I'm scared of messing something up, and most of all... I'm scared of hurting her." Mink understood all of that. At this moment, she was scared she would hurt Peacemaker.

"I'm sure she'd be happy with you. She definitely trusts you the most out of all of us," Mink said, grabbing a few mangoes. "Sorry, I gotta go bring these to Peacemaker. I'll see you later." She ran back down the halls to Peacemaker's cave, where she found him reading the scroll again.

"Oh, hey." He said. She sat beside him and handed him a mango. "Didn't need to get *that* many."

"Then save them for later. Eat one, and then sleep."

"Why? Don't wanna talk to me anymore?" Peacemaker joked, biting into the mango.

"No, I don't. Eat, then sleep. I'm worried about you, and if you won't take care of yourself, I'll take care of you."

"That sounded really weird, but don't worry about me, alright? I appreciate it, but it's fine," he said, taking another bite out of the mango. He ate the rest of it, and Mink set the rest of the mangoes on a table beside his bed.

"Sleep," Mink said, pushing him down on his bed.

"Bedtime story?"

"You're not a kid anymore. Why don't you want to sleep!?"

"Because every time I sleep, I see my mother, alright!? She's been in every single dream I've had since she's died because she's all I ever think about now," he said, sitting up again. "She constantly reminds me that it was all my fault."

"It wasn't your fault. No one blames you. Your mother wouldn't even be blaming you."

"I do. And so does Darkstalker."

"Well, don't listen to anything he says. I understand you don't want to sleep, but you need it. I'll be right here beside you, okay?"

"Maybe we can-"

"Sleep! You can sleep! That's what you're gonna do! 'Wow, great idea Mink! You're so smart!' Moons, do I gotta get a tranq dart for you? That's becoming less and less of a joke now!" Mink couldn't tell if she was actually upset or not. As she said this, a *whoosh* went past her head and hit Peacemaker in the neck. A large dart hung off the side.

"All covered," Clay said from behind. "Heard you two talking really loudly and brought a blow dart with me just in case."

"Convenient," Peacemaker mumbled before sleeping peacefully. Mink tossed the dart back to Clay, and he left. Mink stared at Peacemaker, letting out a sigh of relief for two reasons. She finally got him to eat and sleep, and she lifted the weight of bottling up her feelings for him. She almost considered lying down beside him and falling asleep right there. But she decided to let him sleep peacefully.

Get off me you gremlin!

"Cliff! You're here earlier than normal. What's up?" Tsunami asked. She was getting ready for a history class since Webs had to leave for very vague reasons. Cliff always showed up to classes early because he liked the quiet classroom. It was peaceful.

"Nothing. I just didn't have anything to do leading up to the class," Cliff said. He sat where he usually sat, waiting for his friends. Peacemaker had been in a better mood, so maybe he'd actually show up to class. Not long after Cliff showed up, a couple more students showed up too. His mental peace was gone now.

"Hey Cliff," Auklet said as she came in. "This'll be a nice change of pace without the Sea Slime as our teacher."

"He's not terrible," Cliff said.

"Yeah, sure. You're the history nut, so of course you like him." Cliff looked down like he usually did whenever Auklet playfully insulted him. Not because it hurts him, but because he's worried he upset her. "Hey, I'm kidding. You're much better at explaining history than him. I'd take you as my teacher over him any day."

"I technically am your teacher. I have to explain a lot of it to you," Cliff said. Auklet playfully shoved him lightly. They watched as a few more students showed up. Bumblebee entered with Gale, and Mink entered with Peacemaker, although he looked pained. "Peacemaker! You're actually here! You alright?"

"Yeah, just a bit dizzy. Nothing to worry about," he said.

"Alright everyone, take a seat!" Tsunami called out. "We'll be starting soon." Cliff heard Peacemaker take a couple deep breaths. *He said not to worry, but I'm still gonna worry.*

"Peacemaker, if you're gonna throw up, do it elsewhere," Auklet whispered.

"I'm not gonna puke. I just... don't feel right," he whispered back.

"Well, that's ominous," Bumblebee chimed in.

"Alright, so does anyone know where you guys left off?" Tsunami asked the class. There were a few murmurs here and there, but no one answered her. "This really tells me how much you all pay attention."

"Do *you* know where we left off?" A student asked.

"I do. I just wanted to see if any of you actually listen to a damn thing Webs says. But that answered my question."

"I think we've started talking about Darkstalker's time," Mink said. Tsunami pointed at her, signifying that she was right. Peacemaker's head poked up quickly like he suddenly wasn't dizzy at all.

"Correct. Specifically the death of Prince Arctic. Anyone know how he died?" Cliff looked over at Peacemaker, who was flexing his talons, and a smirk formed on his face.

"I killed him," he spoke up.

"Well, I suppose you technically did. You know how?"

"By disembowelment."

"Very good. Now-"

"Tsunami, this is a great class as usual," Peacemaker interrupted. "I just love learning about things I already know, especially since I've lived through most of it."

Oh my god.

"Darkstalker?" Mink said in awe. "Where's Peacemaker!?"

"Living the same hell I've been having to live for the past few months. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm leaving." He ran off without saying another word.

"DARKSTALKER!" Mink yelled, running after him. Cliff heard Tsunami sigh loudly.

"Can't we have *one* normal day at this school?" She said.

Bumblebee chased after him, followed by Gale. "Come on, let's go!" Auklet said to Cliff, and then ran off. Cliff followed her. They ran down the hall until they all caught up to him. Mink grabbed his tail and yanked it. Darkstalker instinctively slashed back at her, drawing a bit of blue blood from Mink's shoulder.

Bumblebee pounced on his head. "LET PEACEMAKER GO DEMONSPAWN!" She shouted.

"Get off me you little gremlin!" Darkstalker threw Bumblebee off him and into Mink.

"MOON!" Auklet shouted. Immediately, Moon came out of her cave. Darkstalker saw her and stopped.

"Darkstalker, let Peacemaker go," she said calmly. Gale pulled Bumblebee off of Mink and they backed behind Moon.

"No! This body is rightfully mine! You turned me into a weak dragonet against my will! With a goddamn strawberry! And as a result of that, my mother got KILLED!"

"Your mother died to protect you. She did it without giving any thought about herself. Something you obviously never learned. Why do you think we turned you into Peacemaker? You wouldn't change, and that's her fault. Nor is it Peacemaker's. But she still loved you anyway."

"Loved me!? You call this 'love!?' She turned me into a dragonet that she could love even more than me because he's so 'perfect in every way!' Because her son wasn't as perfect as she had wanted! Every dragon I've ever cared about has betrayed me! You, my mother, Clearsight, Fathom, and Whiteout!" A lot of students showed up to watch. The other teachers showed up with the crowd.

"How'd your sister betray you exactly?" Moon asked.

"She didn't take my side! She sided with Clearsight and Fathom! She ran away like a coward!"

"She made the smart decision! You murdered her father in front of the entire NightWing tribe!"

"Arctic was a foul dragon who deserved what he got! I don't care how anyone else felt about him! If I could, I would watch him rip out his stomach a million times over!" He turned around, ran outside and took off.

"Geez, I can't even begin to imagine what Peacemaker's going through," Auklet said.

"I'll go follow him," Cliff suddenly blurted. Everyone turned to stare at him. "I- I mean Darkstalker doesn't have any beef with a SkyWing. Moon, he hates you with a burning passion. Mink, you have the blood of his father in you, plus you're an IceWing. Auklet, you've got the blood of Fathom, whomst he hates too. Bumblebee, you've got the blood of Clearsight, and moons knows what he'd do to you for that. So yeah, I'll go."

"Then I'll come!" Gale offered.

"No!" Bumblebee suddenly shouted. She cleared her throat. "I mean, I'm sure Cliff will be fine on his own."

"Actually Gale, I wouldn't recommend coming with me. If I'm wrong, then at least nothing will happen to you. Plus..." Cliff went to Gale's ear and whispered, "I'm pretty sure Bumblebee has a big crush on you, and she could use the company."

Gale smiled shyly. Cliff took a deep breath before taking off after Darkstalker and his friend.

You gotta fly more often, man!

Let me out! You can't leave me in this hell!

Yeah, well now you know how I feel.

It felt horrible to have a body that he had no control of. But it felt really odd too. He could feel his wings getting tired even though he wasn't the one physically flying. He could feel every single emotion Darkstalker was feeling. It was all so overwhelming. He couldn't believe this was what Darkstalker was going through. It was awful.

In addition to that, every single thought he had was *really* loud. They all echoed throughout his head.

"DARKSTALKER!" A familiar voice shouted. Darkstalker looked back and saw red scales flying towards them. Darkstalker growled softly and looked away.

Moons, how did you deal with them? They're so damn persistent.

Maybe we should stop and hear him out?

Darkstalker sighed.

Fine.

He circled back around and landed. He sat there, waiting for Cliff to land. He could feel that Darkstalker was slightly out of breath.

Why are you so damn out of shape?

I haven't flown in a while. Not since the break ended over a month ago.

You gotta fly more often, man.

Cliff landed in front of him, and he wasn't out of breath at all. It probably helped that he was a SkyWing and they have powerful

wings and can fly for hours on end.

"I would've expected Mink to follow. Not you. Hell, I would've expected Auklet to follow before I expected you to follow," Darkstalker said.

"It wouldn't be safe for anyone else to follow you. I know you don't have any beef with the SkyWings," Cliff explained. "Where are you going?"

"Gonna go find BlackIce, and then kill him."

Wait, what!? I never heard anything in your head about doing that!

I used to be a mind reader in a kingdom full of other mind readers. You pick up on how to block it all off.

"That's a horrible idea. If it was that easy, someone else would have already done it. Not to mention, you're not immortal anymore. He could kill you easily," Cliff explained.

"Gee, thanks for the pep talk, dad. Really appreciate it. I'll be fine, and Peacemaker will be fine. Next time you see him, he'll be great. But, moons knows when that'll be because I'm not going back to that school."

Oh yeah? Well, I'll figure out how to take control again, and then I'll go back to the school.

Zip it.

"You're practically holding Peacemaker hostage!" Cliff shouted.

"Yeah, and how's it any different when he's in control?" Cliff opened his mouth to argue, but couldn't think of anything to say. "Look, say goodbye to Peacemaker for now, and then you can see him afterward, alright?"

Cliff sighed. "I better see you soon." He turned around and flew back.

I was really tempted to kill him.

You better leave my friends alone.

Calm down, I'm not a psycho. Here's what we're gonna do. BlackIce is wanted all over the continent, so there must be posters everywhere. The Scorpion Den would be a great place to put posters up. There'd be bounty hunters everywhere there. And the wanted posters usually say where they were last spotted. So we can work from there.

That was painful.

Got any better ideas?

No.

Then shut up, and let's go.

That Worked So Well Last Time

Come on, Cliff, Auklet thought. Cliff had been gone for a while, and she had the nerve to admit to herself that she was worried about him. She was sitting where Cliff and Darkstalker had left, waiting for him to come back, and hoping Darkstalker (or hopefully Peacemaker) would be with him. It was getting dark, making Auklet worry more.

"I'm sure he'll be back soon," Mink said from behind her. She handed Auklet a fish. She had a bandage wrapped around her arm for her scratch from earlier.

"Thank you," she said, taking it, although she wasn't really hungry. She looked at the fish, and it looked like it was staring back up at her even though it was dead, and it kind of creeped her out.

Auklet looked up from the fish and saw red scales flying to them. "Cliff!" Auklet shouted, dropping the fish. He landed, and Auklet almost reached out and hugged him, but pulled away, cleared her throat, and patted him on the shoulder. "Welcome back." Cliff had a frown on his face.

"Where's Peacemaker and Darkstalker?" Mink asked.

"Darkstalker's going to kill BlackIce! There's no way he could take them all on his own!" He said.

"Well, we gotta go stop him!" Mink said. She was about to take off

immediately, but Cliff stopped her.

"Stop, Mink. What could we do?" Cliff asked.

"We could stop him! Tackle him to the ground or something!" Mink suggested.

"Yeah, because that worked so well last time," Auklet said.

"Oh, shut up! Like you helped at all!" Mink shouted. *Oh no, she's pissed.*

Whenever Mink was pissed, Auklet avoided her. She always ended up talking her anger out on her friends, though she never means to. She always feels bad, but that's another reason Auklet avoids her. She didn't want Mink to feel bad for her.

"Alright, calm down. We can *try* it, but I don't know if that'll be enough." Auklet looked off in the distance, the darkening sky making it difficult to see anything. But she saw a pale figure flying to the school, and Auklet immediately knew who it was.

"It *has* to be enough! There's nothing more we can do!" Mink cried. Panic was running through her voice.

"Where's Moon!?" Qibli shouted before landing, making Mink yelp in surprise.

"Qibli! We have to go get Peacemaker! He-" Mink started.

"I know, I know! Where's Moon?"

"Probably her cave," Auklet said. Qibli rushed into the school without saying anything else.

"Should we follow?" Cliff asked. Mink followed Qibli without answering. "Jeez, she's panicking out of her mind right now."

"What do you expect? Her boyfriend is technically being held hostage right now," Auklet said.

"Yeah, that's what I told Darkstalker. And he said, 'how's in any different when he's in control?' He's got a point. But at the same time, Peacemaker isn't an evil ex-animus who almost killed all the IceWings." They followed Mink and stopped outside Moon's cave.

"Let me come with!" Mink's voice cried.

"No! Three moons, I can see why Tsunami was so tired of us when we were in school," Moon's voice said.

"Please! At least so I can see him in case something happens to him! What if he gets killed!? I'll never get to see him again!" Mink's voice started to break. Auklet peeked in.

"She's got a point," Qibli said.

"You're taking her side!?"

"I'm just saying. We have no idea if something'll happen to Peacemaker. She should get to see him just in case," Qibli defended. "And I think that should go for all of his friends." The SandWing winked at the IceWing.

Moon sighed. "Fine." She saw Auklet's head peeking in. "I knew you two were there the whole time."

"You guys go get Bumblebee. Moon, can we talk?" They left before they heard anything else. Bumblebee was in her bed next to Gale. They were reading a scroll together, which Auklet thought was kind of adorable.

"Hey guys! Cliff! You're back! Did you get Peacemaker? Oh wait, no. He's not with you," Bumblebee said.

"We're gonna go get him," Auklet said. "You two coming?"

"Heck yeah! You coming Gale?"

"Yeah, sure!" The SkyWing responded. Bumblebee set down the scroll and they hopped out of the bed. They ran back down the hall to Moon's cave where the NightWing was in her bed, asleep. Qibli was sitting beside her. "Whoa, is she alright?" Gale asked.

"Yeah. I tranquilized her without her knowing. She hadn't slept in days. That's why she was so grouchy," the SandWing said.

"Will she be alright?" Cliff asked.

"Pretty sure. Unless someone put poison in the dart."

"Alright, let's go! Let's go! Let's go!" Mink shouted, grabbing Qibli's arm and tugging.

"Alright, calm down. Let's get going before it gets too late. If we're lucky, we can catch him if he sleeps," the SandWing said.

They all ran out of the school, and took off in the direction where Darkstalker and Peacemaker went.

You Probably Should've Brought Some Kind of Weapon

So the bastard's in there.

Are you sure this is the dark, spooky cave the poster was referring to?

Fairly certain. There's a sharp turn, and there's light coming from it.

That doesn't mean anything. It could just be-

Shut up. We're going in.

The cave has a huge opening in the side of a large sand dune. The cave looked like it could collapse at any second from the mass amount of sand on top of it and the fact that you could occasionally see rocks rolling off the sides.

Jeez, this cave is older than me.

The sharp turn was only a couple feet away from the entrance. When they turned, they saw torches hanging off the sides.

They gotta be here.

Well... maybe there's a crazy, old dragon in here.

That would be quite the find. No doubt they'd try to eat us.

They took another turn and came across a familiar SkyWing.

"HAHA! BlackIce KNEW you'd come for him!" Jet shouted. "Hey-!" Darkstalker clasped his snout shut.

"This doesn't concern you. Now, if you would be so kind, could you let BlackIce know I'm coming?" Darkstalker asked, letting his snout go. Jet ran off, and Darkstalker slowly followed.

We're not gonna be stealthy?

No. I want this to be satisfying. Stealth isn't satisfying enough. I wanna see the life leave his eyes.

Maybe you should rethink this. If you fail, we're screwed.

Maybe you should shut the hell up? I don't care if this is putting us at risk. If I can get a chance to kill the dragon that killed my mother, I'll die happily.

They entered a larger, open part of the cave. Every other dragon that was at the academy that day was there. The MudWing had a bandage over the eye that got jabbed. BlackIce was nowhere to be seen

Where's BlackIce?

He suddenly landed in front of them. He had tired eyes, and he wasn't wearing his satchel. However, he still had his cape on. Jet landed next to him.

BlackIce sighed. "Hey, kid. Good to see you again," he said, rubbing his eyes. "You should've come an hour or two later. I was napping."

"I've come to kill you!" Darkstalker shouted.

"Yeah, I've noticed. But you probably should've brought some sort of weapon though." Darkstalker suddenly blasted fire at the hybrid. BlackIce didn't move, but instead held his cape in front of his face and chest. When he was done shooting fire in the hybrid's direction, BlackIce moved the cape down. The cape wasn't burnt at all, nor was BlackIce. All the dragons around them snickered. "Like it? Made it out of the scales of a fireproof MudWing."

"What the hell!?" Darkstalker yelled. "You skinned a MudWing!?"

"No, I just peeled off each scale one by one. It took hours and hours to make," BlackIce explained. Darkstalker sighed and lunged at BlackIce, but he simply stepped out of the way. "Kid, I don't think you realize how bad of an idea this is."

"I'm not Peacemaker! Don't call me 'kid!'" Darkstalker said.

"Wait what?" Darkstalker lunged at him and BlackIce held out a talon, stopping him as he hit it. He struggled to reach him, but BlackIce kept holding him in place. "What do you mean you're not Peacemaker? Are you who I think you are?"

Great! Now he knows!

What's so bad about that?

"Yes! I'm Darkstalker!"

"Interesting. Then I feel no guilt about doing *this*." BlackIce slashed Darkstalker's face, cutting it open. The dragons around them laughed.

"KILL 'EM!!" The HiveWing shouted.

"Snakeroot, hit him with the venom!" Jet shouted, laughing. The RainWing smiled mischievously and shot venom from his mouth. It hit Darkstalker directly in the chest. He roared in pain, trying to claw it off.

Why can I feel all the pain!?

Because we're in the same FUCKING BODY!!

When he clawed it all off, it still left a horrible burning sensation. He also burnt his talons by trying to get it off. He then suddenly felt a heavy hit to the back of the head, and the strangest thing happened. It felt like Peacemaker just got thrusted into the body. Like he was apart from it.

What the hell?

He moved his talons to the back of his head, trying to ease the pain and-

Wait... I'm in control of my own body again!

Wh- what?

He turned around and saw BlackIce standing over him. "Wait! Stop! I- I didn't want to come here!"

"What? Did Peacemaker tell you to come here? Pretty shitty idea," BlackIce said.

"No! I'm Peacemaker! In this body now!" He was suddenly struck with a burning pain in his back as more venom hit him.

"Snakeroot, stop it for a second." BlackIce painfully scraped the venom off his back. "Is this all some kind of joke? Because I'm pretty sure jokes are supposed to be funny."

"No. Darkstalker figured out a way to take over my mind and body. I was stuck in his mind like he's been with me," Peacemaker explained.

"Alright. I'll take your word for it."

"DARKSTALKER!" A group of dragons came around the corner from the entrance. Peacemaker recognized all of them. They were his friends!

"Guys! It's me, Peacemaker!" Mink immediately rushed over to him and wrapped her wings around him. For the first time in a while, he felt safe. "How'd you know how to find me?"

"Qibli just kind of led us here," Cliff said.

"Come on guys. Let's get going," Qibli said.

"Hello Qibli," BlackIce said calmly.

"BlackIce," the SandWing replied.

"Still don't regret your decision?"

"Not even in the slightest."

Decision? What's he talking about?

Probably something stupid. Now LET ME BACK IN THE BODY!

Screw off.

"Your sister has told us a LOT about you," BlackIce said.

"All good, I hope?" Qibli looked at his sister for a minute before turning away. "Let's get out of here kids."

"I'm kind of curious about your 'decision' that you made," Auklet said.

"It's not a big deal. I'll tell you when we leave." Everything was starting to look a tad blurry. He didn't know if it was from the head trauma or not, but Mink's scales as she kept a wing around him felt so warm and comfortable.

"No, why not tell them now? You've got no reason to hide it," BlackIce said.

"Alright. A couple years ago, this son of a bitch tried to get me to join his little band. But I declined for Moon because I love her, and I couldn't put her through any of that," he explained.

"Oh. The way you were making it sound made me feel like it was something terrible," Bumblebee said.

"Yeah, but we knew you were smart. We could've used someone like you," BlackIce said. "And that's why Moon was my target for a while. But the assholes never left each other alone. But of course, about a month after I gave up, she started working at that school. But I didn't care about Qibli anymore at that point. I realized that as soon as he found out what exactly we do, he would leave. So... we replace him with someone who's a million times better than him."

"That's right," Rattlesnake said.

"Where's Sirocco?" Qibli questioned.

"Dead. He died with Vulture. I'm sure you've heard about that?" Qibli nodded.

"Yeah, something about a rival gang attacking? Serves both of them right," he said. Everything was starting to sound a little fuzzy to

Peacemaker now.

"BlackIce, I'm bored. Can you kill them or just let them leave already?" Jet said. "Backstory stuff and family reunions make me wanna fall asleep."

"Yeah, get outta here. Darkstalker, if you ever come back here, I won't be so gentle next time. Hell, I might kill you," BlackIce said as they started walking out.

"Qibli, are you alright?" Bumblebee asked.

"Yeah, that was... just a bit much for me," the SandWing said. They kept walking until they reached the mouth of the cave. "Are you alright Peacemaker?"

At that moment, Peacemaker realized he was barely holding himself up, and was leaning hard into Mink, who didn't seem to mind at all. "I don't know," he muttered. "Hold on, I think I just need to sit down for a second."

He sat in the sand and Cliff gave him a gentle hug. "I was worried about you, man," he said. Peacemaker hugged back, but almost leaned into him too much and almost fell over, but Cliff caught him.

"We can get you to the Stronghold and the healers can help you with the scratch and the burns," Qibli said. It had just occurred to the hybrid that blood was still seeping out of his face. The only thing that hurt now was his head. They were about to take off, Mink going last, but Peacemaker stopped her by grabbing her forearm.

"Are you alright?" She asked quietly, gently holding the side of his face that wasn't bleeding.

"G- guys! Guys I- I just need a moment. J- just give me a moment," the hybrid forced out. The others landed back down in front of him. At this point, he felt himself blacking out.

"Are you okay?" Gale asked.

"I- I'm fine. I just-" he couldn't finish his sentence. He tried to force

the rest out, but everything went black before he could.

I did NOT condone that!

"Oh, hello Bumblebee," Qibli said as the HiveWing landed in front of Thorn's Stronghold. "Not Mink this time?"

"No, we all had to force her to stay," Bumblebee said. "Even Tsunami had to help."

"Honestly surprised Tsunami's even letting you come here," the SandWing said, leading her inside. It somehow felt even hotter inside than the hot desert outside. Qibli led Bumblebee down a couple halls until they reached the healers' room. Peacemaker was lying in a bed, still unconscious. He was looking a lot better. The scratch on his face was all stitched up, which left a cool scar. His burns were still very visible, but they've healed a considerable amount.

"It's been a week. How's he still out?" Bumblebee asked.

"He got hit hard in the head. He'll wake up when he can." Bumblebee sat beside the hybrid and Qibli studied her. "Are you alright?"

"Hm? Yeah, why?"

"You're just... not really acting like yourself. You're usually hyper and talking a lot."

"Oh. I'm just tired, that's all. Didn't sleep. Which is probably a good thing. I bet the SandWings here would be annoyed with me." She didn't actually know what was wrong with her. Lately, she's been feeling down for no real reason. But Qibli barked out a laugh.

"No, not at all! They could use someone like you to spice up their lives a bit!" They heard Peacemaker shuffle a bit and groan.

"You're really loud, Qibli," he muttered. The SandWing smiled and went to the opposite side of Bumblebee. The hybrid pressed a talon

to his head in pain and looked at Bumblebee. "Hey. You weren't who I was expecting to wake up to."

"Let me guess. Mink?" Bumblebee said. Peacemaker smiled and nodded slightly. He sat up a bit more, and looked around. "She was really anxious the entire time. Cliff and Auklet had to keep her back so I came."

"How well can you focus?" Qibli asked.

"Alright. Everything is slightly blurry. Probably because I just woke up from being unconscious for... how long?"

"A week," the HiveWing said.

Peacemaker groaned. "A week? Seriously?" He sat up completely, and grasped his head again. He stood up dizzily, but quickly recovered.

"Are you alright?" Qibli asked, brushing one of his wings with his own.

"Just peachy," the hybrid responded. He leaned into the SandWing slightly, and he put a wing around him. Bumblebee just kind of sat there awkwardly. She didn't really have anything to say.

"Should I go tell everyone else that you're up?" She asked, breaking the silence.

"Sure. Peacemaker, wanna go with her?" Qibli asked.

"Sure, I guess." They went back out to the entrance. Peacemaker gave Qibli one last hug before they took off. Right off the bat, Peacemaker noticed Bumblebee being quiet. "Hey, are you-?"

"Don't. I've just been feeling... off. A couple days ago, I just started not feeling like myself anymore. I don't know how else to describe it. Gale is the only other one I've actually talked to about it. Can we just keep this between us? I don't really want everyone else to worry about me. You two are the ones I trust the most and I didn't even wanna tell you. You've got your own problems going on and I didn't want to add to them." She looked at the hybrid who nodded

to the ground and landed. Bumblebee landed beside him and he wrapped his wings around her. She couldn't help but smile and wrapped her four wings around him. She rested her head against his collarbone while avoiding the burn on his chest.

"You know, I'm sure Mink would be more than happy-"

"*No!*" Bumblebee interrupted, pulling away. "I don't want her to know right now. Please keep this between the three of us. *Please!*" She pleaded. Peacemaker sighed and nodded. "Thank you."

"Alright, let's go. Don't want Mink to continue freaking out," the hybrid said, lifting into the air. Bumblebee followed. As they went on, she could see Peacemaker struggle slightly when flying. She would also see him occasionally grasp his head in pain.

"Hey, are you alright?" Bumblebee asked.

"Yeah, just... headache." The rainbow undersides of his wings were shining bright in the desert sun, it was almost mesmerizing. She had to look away so it didn't blind her.

It didn't take too long before they saw the school. There were a couple of young dragons flying around the peak, chasing each other.

"Where would everyone be right now?" Peacemaker asked as they landed.

"Probably class. I think it's history right now." She saw him rub his head again. They passed by a group of dragons who gave him weird glares. "However, maybe you should go to your cave and recover."

"Nah, it's fine. It's just a headache," he said.

"You said that when Darkstalker took over your body."

"No, I said I was dizzy. I'm not dizzy now. Just a headache. I'm going to class." Bumblebee sighed and followed. They turned a corner and ran into a RainWing that Bumblebee recognized as Tarsier. She was the RainWing who was with Silver when they talked in the library all those months ago.

"Great. You're back," she said, shoving past them.

"Asshole," they both said at the same time. They kept walking until they came across the classroom. Most of the students (including their friends) were there.

"Oh! Hey, welcome back!" Tsunami said. Everyone turned around.

"PEACEMAKER!" Mink shouted, tackling him, not caring that everyone was watching. Bumblebee heard a few dragons chuckle, and some others said, "ew."

Bumblebee giggled as she sidled up beside Gale, who put a wing around her. "I talked to him about it," the HiveWing whispered in Gale's ear.

"How'd it go?" She asked.

"Fine. He's much sweeter to me than he needs to be."

"You've gotta be shitting me," a MudWing said. "How the hell is he still allowed at this school!?" Peacemaker and Mink stood up, smiles fading from their faces.

"Crayfish, st-"

"Zip it Tsunami! All the teachers in this school have defended him, and for what!? As long as he's been here, there's been nothing but trouble! It quickly went from a small fight in the library to BlackIce coming in to kill him, only to kill his mother instead! And then goddamn *Darkstalker* takes over his body and he hurts his friends! And after all this, what's the consequence!? He gets a little bump on the head!" Other students and teachers started showing up at the entrance to the cave. "It's only a matter of time before a student gets killed! He should NOT be allowed in this school. Everything was perfectly fine without him! That month where he was isolated in his cave was the most peaceful month this school has seen all year! Silver, wanna add anything?"

Silver only stared at Crayfish silently. Crayfish stared back, expecting an answer. "Look, I don't really wanna get involved. I don't really blame him for anything anymore. I talked shit about

NightWings and his mother in the library. That's why he lashed out. And word got out about Darkstalker, which led BlackIce here. I saw everything. BlackIce was about to kill him, but Foeslayer saved him, so he killed her instead. Nothing was his fault. So give him a break."

"Are you *fucking* kidding me!? Is no one with me!?" Crayfish shouted. The students around them started murmuring. Bumblebee heard some agree and some disagree.

"You're right," a SandWing named Fennec growled. She was always a more aggressive dragon, so teachers kept an eye on her all the time. "Peacemaker is too dangerous to be kept alive."

"Whoa, I wasn't going *that* far," Crayfish said.

"It's not like you can talk," Auklet said. "You radiate danger."

"Go fuck yourself, asshole!" Fennec shouted.

"Guys, I can leave if that's what you all want. I don't wanna put anyone in danger," Peacemaker said, his voice breaking slightly.

"No!" Mink said. At the same time, Crayfish said, "good!"

"Mink, they've got a point," the hybrid said.

"But so has Silver," Cliff said.

"Fennec!" Moon shouted from the crowd. She pushed her way to the front. "Put your tail down." Fennec looked up, suddenly realizing that she had her tail up like a scorpion.

"No," she suddenly said. "Peacemaker should get what he deserves. And he deserves to *die*!" She emphasized that last part by lunging at Peacemaker. She got tackled herself by Clay, but her tail grazed Peacemaker's shoulder, leaving a small cut.

"Oh shit," he muttered, looking at his shoulder.

"Ohmygosh! Are you alright!?" Mink panicked.

"Calm down! I'm alright. I'm sure there's more than enough

brightsting cactus here."

"I did NOT condone that!" Crayfish shouted.

"You're the one who started all this, dumbass," Bumblebee said.

"I never said, 'I don't think he should be here so let's kill him!'"

Bumblebee looked over at Clay, who had Fennec pinned down with Tsunami holding down her tail so she didn't stab Clay.

"Everyone go to your caves!" Sunny shouted from the crowd. The students all funneled through the halls, though some still lingered to watch, which Sunny sent away. "Are you alright, Peacemaker?"

"Yeah, but she got me with her tail," he said, pointing to his shoulder. Sunny sighed, pulling a brightsting cactus out of a bag wrapped around her chest.

"Three moons, that's been stabbing my chest all day," she said.

"How much will this hurt?" Mink asked.

"It burns quite a bit." She cut it open and squeezed the juice out onto the scratch. Peacemaker hissed through his teeth, squeezing Mink's talon.

"GET OFF ME!" Fennec shouted, trying to kick Tsunami off her tail.

"You guys should go to a different cave for right now. Are you alright Peacemaker?" The hybrid nodded. Sunny ushered them all out of the classroom and they all went into Peacemaker's and Cliff's cave and sat down silently. Peacemaker and Mink have wings around each other, Cliff and Auklet sat beside each other, and Bumblebee and Gale sat beside each other with wings around each other like Peacemaker and Mink.

"It's good to see you, Peacemaker," Cliff said. "Truthfully, are you alright?"

"Yeah. My head just hurts. Darkstalker is being uncharacteristically quiet again. Just normal stuff," he said. Bumblebee suddenly found

it hard to breathe. Like she was being suffocated.

"I'll be back," she muttered.

"Hey, are you alright?" Gale asked.

"Yeah, I just... need some air." But she didn't go outside. Instead, she headed down to the underground lake. It was quiet and relaxing.

When she got down there, she was alone. There were no pesky dragons lingering around. She splashed her face with water, trying to clear her head.

"Come on, Bumblebee! What's going on with you!?" She yelled at herself. "You're being stupid! Nothing bad is even happening! Where's all this anxiety coming from? Where are all these depressing thoughts coming from?"

Yeah, but if something bad happens, you'll deserve it.

"Wait what? Where'd that come from?"

You deserve all the pain you've gone through and all the pain that you will eventually go through.

"Bumblebee?" A voice said behind her. It made her yelp and then fall into the pool. "Oh my gosh, I'm so sorry," Gale laughed.

Bumblebee sputtered and climbed out. "It's fine. Don't worry about it," she coughed out. She shook herself, trying to shake off as much water as she could.

"I heard what you were saying. I'm always here for you. You don't need to be scared to talk to me," the SkyWing said. She wrapped her big wings around Bumblebee, who started tearing up. Of course, she was too scared to tell her. She'll always be too scared to. She didn't want to add more stress to Gale's life. She knew Gale already had a stressful life with her parents and everything.

"I promise I won't be too scared to," she said, knowing full well she'd break that promise.

What a Charmer

We're gonna ignore the fact that it's been almost 2 months since I last posted.

"Oh, that makes things a lot easier," Fatespeaker said, approaching Moon. "You got another visitor. And Auklet, I have a message for you." She handed the SeaWing a slightly damp scroll. Moon ran out of the library, and Auklet sighed.

"What is it?" Peacemaker asked.

"My goddamn mother is making me go to the Sea Kingdom next week during the break. Son of a bitch," she said.

"It says you can bring a friend if you want," Cliff said.

"Are you kidding!? I'm not bringing any of you! My mother is crazy!"

"GOD FUCKING DAMMIT!!" That was Tsunami.

"Sounds like she got an invitation too," Mink said. Moon popped her head into the library with a smile on her face.

"Peacemaker, could you come out here real quick?" She requested. He tilted his head, and followed her out of the library, only to be met with wings tightly wrapping around him, but they weren't black. They were pink and yellow.

"Peacemaker! It's great to see you!"

"Kinkajou!? What're you doing here!?" Peacemaker laughed.

"I came here because Moon asked me to. But it was great seeing you again!" Moon led her away down the hall. "So, the others are here, right?" Peacemaker didn't hear the rest of the conversation as he went back into the library.

"What was that for?" Mink asked.

"She just wanted to tell me Kinkajou was here."

"Auklet!" Tsunami burst in. "Auklet, can you do me a favor?"

"Depends," Auklet said.

"Can you take my invitation and pretend it got sent to you, so you went instead?" Auklet held up her own invitation and Tsunami threw hers down in anger. "FUCK!"

"Why don't you just *not* go?" Mink asked.

"Because then we'd NEVER hear the end of it. And she'll probably threaten to disown us, but that's the least of our problems," Tsunami explained. She sighed, rubbing her face. "Coral is the last dragon I want to see right now."

Peacemaker tuned out the rest of the conversation and looked over at Bumblebee, who was sitting alone, staring at the ground. He silently went up to her so the others didn't notice as they were still talking to Tsunami. Gale left early because of family issues, so Bumblebee usually sits alone, away from the group.

"How're you doing?" He asked gently. She shrugged.

"I guess it's not as bad today, but it's not any better either if that makes sense. It's weird," she explained. Peacemaker knew exactly how that felt. He went through that exact feeling when his mother died.

"Yeah. Yeah, I get that." Bumblebee rested her forehead against his chest and sighed.

"I think I'm gonna get some rest. I just need to be alone for a bit," she said, looking up at him. "I'll see you later." She pulled back and walked away, her tail dragging on the ground behind her. Peacemaker watched her until she turned the corner out of the library. When he went back to the group, everyone looked at him expectantly.

"What?" He asked.

"What's going on with her?" Auklet asked. "And don't try to lie. We've all noticed, and she's not doing a very good job at hiding it."

"She's just tired, that's all. She just left to get some extra rest," he explained.

"By that logic, she's been really tired for the past couple weeks," Mink said.

"Guys, it's none of our business," Tsunami said. "So let's drop it."

Peacemaker exhaled softly in relief and mouthed "thank you" to the SeaWing.

"Tsunami, could we just *not* go and then face the heat later?" Auklet asked.

"Then she'd probably try to guilt-trip us and I don't really wanna deal with that," Tsunami said. "Besides, she'd probably send random SeaWings to hunt us down and bring us to her."

"No! Forget it! I don't want any part in this! Whatever happened happened! That's the end of it!" A voice shouted from the hall.

"Winter!" Moon's voice shouted. "These things aren't *supposed* to happen!"

"Winter?" Mink muttered. She ran over to the exit of the library and a larger, angry looking IceWing bumped into her.

"Hey, watch it!" He said, stumbling back. He looked at her and his angry expression disappeared immediately into a surprised one. "Mink? Holy crap, I haven't seen you in years! Your sister doesn't want me to see you."

"What? Why? I thought you two ended on good terms," Mink said.

"We did. But I think she's worried I'll turn you into me."

"What's so bad about that?"

"So much," a familiar voice said behind Winter and Moon. "One Winter is bad enough, I don't think anyone could handle two." A friendly, pale yellow face with a scar on his snout popped his head up.

"Qibli!" Kinkajou shouted from behind him. She aggressively wrapped her wings around him and he returned it. "It's great to see you! How long has it been, two years?"

"Something like that. Sorry I'm late, I had to stop some guy from beating an old lady with a stick." He hugged Moon, but Winter pulled back when he tried to hug him. "Come on, buddy! Won't even give your old pal a hug!?"

Winter sighed and rolled his eyes. He spread a wing out to hug him but Qibli completely embraced him, making the IceWing instinctually kick him back, earning a laugh from the others.

"How've you been, man? Been awhile," Qibli said with an uncharacteristically amount of sincerity.

"A lot better," Winter answered, a small hint of a smile creeping up his face.

"Where's Turtle?"

"Still in Moon's cave. He needs rest from flying all the way here," Kinkajou said. "He was doing some business in the Ice Kingdom."

"Wait, what? What does he do now?" Auklet asked.

"He secretly goes around all the kingdoms, making sure no tribes are secretly plotting against others. Sounds exhausting," the RainWing said.

"Isn't that technically illegal?" Mink asked.

"Yeah, but don't tell him that. He'd probably get stressed out about it."

"So, what'd you bring them here to talk about?" Peacemaker asked. Moon and Winter glanced at each other.

"It's... nothing important," Moon said.

"Seems important to me," a SeaWing said from behind Moon, making her jump slightly into Qibli.

"Turtle!" The SandWing said, hugging him.

"Hey, not that this isn't a beautiful reunion, but why *did* you tell them to come here?" Tsunami asked.

"Um... no reason," the NightWing said.

"Why can't you tell her?" Kinkajou whispered.

"Because I don't want her to freak out."

"Hey, I would NEVER freak out!" Tsunami protested. "I'm super calm! Hell, I'm probably the calmest teacher in the school!" Peacemaker heard Auklet and Cliff snicker behind him.

"Speaking of which... Turtle," Auklet started. "Can you do something for Tsunami and I?"

"Uh... sure?" The prince responded.

"Take this." Auklet handed him her invitation and Turtle sighed.

"Jokes on you, I got invited too," he said, holding up his own invitation.

"WHAT THE FUCK!? SINCE WHEN DID MOTHER CARE ABOUT YOU!? I THOUGHT SHE DIDN'T CARE ABOUT HER SONS!" Tsunami shouted. A couple dragons poked their heads out of caves to see what that was. Turtle winced slightly at what she said.

"Ouch." He ducked his head slightly and his ears fell back.

"Awww, don't worry Turtle. Even if your mother doesn't care about you, *we* do," Kinkajou said, pulling him into a tight hug. Her scales turned slightly pink over her usual yellow hue. Turtle had a faint blush form on his face.

"Well, she *does* care about me. We talked when Anemone tried to kill her. Damn, it's been five years," he muttered under his breath.

"Excuse me, what?" Auklet said. "Anemone tried to kill mother?"

"Yeah, you were still really young. Not even six months old," Turtle said. Auklet looked taken aback by that, clearly having a hard time processing that.

Moon had a slightly frustrated look on her face like she heard something everyone else didn't. Of course, it probably was something no one else heard, knowing Moon. Qibli noticed too and muttered something to her.

"I suppose you heard me coming," an unfamiliar voice said. Peacemaker looked past the older dragons, who all turned around. There was an IceWing with a light blue hue. Peacemaker had a hard time reading his face. It was almost completely emotionless. "Well, if it isn't Peacemaker."

"Um. Have we met?" The hybrid said. He looked over to Mink, who shrugged.

"Apologies. My name's Firn. I just had to come to see if all the rumors were true. And I guess they are. And you're mother is..." he trailed off.

"Dead," Peacemaker finished, looking down. Mink put a wing around him, which drew a confused face from Winter.

"Oh, thank goodness! BlackIce did something right for once," Firn said. Peacemaker looked up at him in anger and disgust. "I mean, my condolences, of course. But she raised you and Darkstalker, so... how good of a mother could she be?" Peacemaker growled at him.

"Alright, you've overstayed your welcome. Get outta here," Qibli said, grabbing Firn's shoulder to pull him away. Peacemaker felt Mink tighten her hold on him to keep him from doing anything.

"Nah, nah. She got what she deserved. If it weren't for her, a lot of innocent IceWings would still have those that they loved, myself included."

"So you came here for a quick 'I-told-you-so'? What a charmer. Foeslayer and Peacemaker had nothing to do with this. It was Darkstalker," Qibli said.

"Because of bad parenting." Firn pulled away from the SandWing and approached Peacemaker again. When he got closer, Peacemaker noticed numerous large scars on his wrists, stained in blue blood. One even looked very recent. Peacemaker growled louder as the IceWing got closer. "Gonna cry? How about you cry to your mother." Peacemaker tried to lash at him, but Mink held him back.

"Get outta here!" Qibli said again, yanking him a lot more violently than before. Firn turned to leave, but turned back one more time.

"I'll be seeing you again soon, Peacemaker."

"JUST LEAVE!" Peacemaker roared, making some of the others jump slightly. Firn turned back and left. Everyone else turned to look at the hybrid. He got out from under Mink's wing and stormed off to his sleeping cave. He picked up the nearest scroll and threw it at the wall in anger. He accidentally knocked down an old bracelet he got from his mother off a small table next to his bed. "Sorry mother," he mumbled, picking it back up and placing it back on the table. He sat down on his bed and stared at the ground.

Something tells me you're upset.

What was your first clue?

You could maybe... kill him?

No, it's not worth it.

I'd say it is. If he's gonna be talking that way about my- OUR mother, he should fucking die.

Shut up. You have no right to talk. You're the goddamn reason ANY of that even happened! Peacemaker felt himself start to tear up.

If I didn't do what I did, you wouldn't be alive, so you're welcome.

MAYBE IT WOULD BE BETTER THAT WAY! MAYBE IT WOULD BE BETTER IF I WASN'T ALIVE!

Dramatic much? If you die, I die. I'm not ready to roll those dice right now.

Peacemaker growled, completely fed up with Darkstalker's selfishness.

"You don't even seem to care that she's dead!"

Of course I care!

"Do you!? Do you even realize how little you actually show it!?"

Do you realize you're speaking out loud?

You seemed to give more concern when you thought *she was dead instead of when you knew she's dead.*

I feel like there are bigger problems here than her death. For example, I'm stuck with you for the rest of my life.

If it was possible, Peacemaker would've clawed Darkstalker's face off. *A close alternative would be...*

He raked his talons across his face, drawing quite a bit of blood.

Ow! What the fuck is wrong with you!?

If it works, it works.

"Peacemaker?" The hybrid looked up at the cave entrance and saw Mink standing there, looking understandably concerned. "Why would you do that to yourself?"

"To shut Darkstalker up," he said plainly.

"Well, you didn't need to hurt yourself." She gently pressed against his face with her talon, applying a bit of pressure. He leaned his head against her talon.

"This isn't really necessary, but don't stop," the hybrid said with a

smile.

Gross.

"Are you okay, though? You kind of worried everyone when you stormed off like that. And then I got briefly interrogated by Winter. He asked if we were dating, and he freaked out slightly when I said yes," Mink explained.

"I'm not okay. I'm pissed off and something's bothering me." He pulled away from her, her talon stained red with his blood. "He seemed to know BlackIce right?"

"No no no. Peacemaker, I know what you're thinking. You can't trust BlackIce at all, and definitely won't like it if you show up unexpectedly," Mink reasoned.

"He didn't seem to care when Darkstalker went there. At the same time, he was pretty tired. I think he had just woken up. But that's besides the point. I can go ask him about Firn, and I can decide if I should be worried about him or not." He kissed her cheek and left the cave.

"Whoa, wait! You're leaving now?" She questioned, catching up to him. "Let me come with you."

"No, Mink. If he does try to kill me, which I doubt, I don't want you to die too. Stay here where it's safe, please." He kissed her again, and left her again, but she didn't follow this time.

I think I'm with Mink on this one.

Shush. We'll be fine as long as we don't run into-

"Peacemaker?" He turned a corner and ran into a SandWing.

-Qibli. Dammit.

"Where're you going?" He asked. He inspected his face. "What the hell happened to your face?"

"Um... I fell."

"You think I'm stupid? I know claw marks when I see them."

"Um... where are the others?"

"In Moon's cave. Winter wasn't very *thrilled* about you and Mink. Moon and I calmed him down. You're welcome by the way. Now, please answer my questions." The hybrid didn't know what to say. He knew Qibli wouldn't approve of him going to see BlackIce.

"Just going out to fly around. Just to, y'know, stretch my wings." Qibli wasn't convinced at all. As Peacemaker tried going past him, the SandWing stopped him.

"I'm not an idiot. I can tell when dragons are in a hurry. And I'm an expert at annoying them and making them late for whatever they're doing. Where are you going?" Qibli didn't actually look mad or upset. He looked mostly concerned or worried.

"I told you! I'm just going out for a flight! That's all! I'm not interested in testing your trust issues right now! I just wanna be alone right now!"

"Hey, I just wanted to make sure you were alright and weren't gonna do something stupid." That caught him slightly off guard because he knew for a fact that what he was doing was rather stupid. But if he knows BlackIce, he knows he won't kill Peacemaker unless he was his target. That being said, Peacemaker was kind of in a hurry.

"I'm not! Just let me through, for fuck sake!" He said, a lot harsher than he meant to. He sort of shoved past him, leaving a very concerned Qibli standing in the hall alone.

Alright, all I gotta do is avoid anyone else.

Right as he thought this, he ran into an IceWing. Before he saw his face, he thought it was Winter, but as he looked up, he saw the face of Silver, who had a slight blue blush. Peacemaker was prepared for Silver to shove him out of the way, but instead he just sort of stood there, looking away. "S- sorry," he said. He was acting really odd. Was he embarrassed? Nervous? Both?

"It's alright. Are you okay?" Peacemaker asked.

"Yeah! Perfectly fine! N- nothing's wrong! Bye!" The IceWing ran past him, trying to hide the blush that grew bigger on his face.

Something tells me you're gonna keep running into dragons.

What was up with that? He was acting really odd.

Who cares? Dragons act oddly all the time.

Peacemaker continued down the hall and ran past the cave where Bumblebee was. He thought maybe he should say goodbye to her since he wouldn't see her until after break. She was laying on her back in her bed, looking up at the ceiling.

Quit stalling.

I'll make it quick.

"Hey Bumblebee." She blinked for a second and looked over at the hybrid. "I'm leaving, so I thought I'd check up on you real quick." She sat up.

"Hey." Peacemaker sat beside her and she pressed her head against his neck and he put a wing around her. "Where're you going?"

"Yeahhh, about that..." he started. She looked up at him, giving him a skeptical look. "Please don't tell Qibli or Moon or anyone. Mink already knows. I'm gonna talk to BlackIce."

"What!? Why would you even think of doing that!?"

"When you left, we met an IceWing named Firn. He very clearly hates me and he mentioned BlackIce. That's all you really need to know," he explained.

"That's a terrible idea!" She said.

"Yeah, Mink already gave me the pep-talk. I'll be careful. I promise. Will you be alright?" She shrugged.

"I'll be going back home to Pantala since this break is two weeks instead of one. Peacemaker, I don't want this to be the last time I see you. Please please PLEASE be safe!" She pulled him into a tight hug. Peacemaker pulled her in tighter. "Promise me."

"Alright, I promise."

Sure hope I don't break my promise.

Knowing your luck thus far, I say you will.

They let each other go and Peacemaker stood up. "I'll see you later." She waved goodbye to him as he could see her eyes tearing up a bit. He reached over to her and wiped a tear away. "I promise," he said one more time.

"I know, I know. I just... don't want to lose you," Bumblebee choked out.

"You won't. BlackIce wouldn't kill anyone who wasn't his target. I'm not his target anymore. At least, I don't think I am. If he does try to kill me... then I guess I break my promise. But I don't think he will." He hugged her one more time before leaving the cave.

I really hope she'll be alright.

How do you know there's actually something wrong with her? Girls are manipulative.

Alright, that's too far. Plus, you can't really talk.

I can and I will.

Thankfully, Peacemaker didn't run into any more dragons on his way out. Just before taking off, Darkstalker spoke.

Wait, hold on. Are you sure this is a good idea?

No, not at all.

Then... why're we doing this?

Because I need to know if Firn is a real threat or not.

I think it's apparent. Guy seems insane and he hates you. Seems threatening to me.

You have trust issues.

Because of dragons like him.

Alright, whatever. We're leaving.

Before you go, shouldn't you say goodbye to Cliff and Auklet?

We've wasted enough time. Mink or Bumblebee can talk to them.

He wanted to say goodbye to them, but they would also beg him to stay, and he didn't want to deal with that.

The Sand Kingdom's... west of here.

He took off, scared of what would happen, guilty about not talking to Cliff and Auklet, worried about Bumblebee, annoyed with Darkstalker, confused about how Silver was acting, and guilty about yelling at Qibli. He felt so many different emotions at that moment than he ever had in his entire life.

This is gonna be a long break.

Haha backstory

"Checkmate," Rattlesnake said from across the cave.

"FUCK!" Jet shouted. BlackIce turned to see him throwing chess pieces at the Sandwing, who's blocking them with her wings. Landslide was drunk as usual, Snakeroot was reading, Coldsnap was guarding the entrance, and Huntsman was sidling up next to BlackIce, who was standing over a marked map of Pyrrhia on a table.

"Hey love," she said. She put her two left wings around him and they pressed their heads together.

"Hey," the hybrid said.

"Whatcha doing?"

"Getting away from everyone. You?"

"Same."

"Rattlesnake, tell him!" Jet yelled, dragging her to BlackIce and Huntsman.

"No! I never agreed to it!" Rattlesnake yelled back, pulling away.

"BlackIce, tell her she has to do it!"

"Tell her what?" BlackIce said, irritation taking over his voice.

"That she should kill Qibli! He should obviously be our next target, and we should make Rattlesnake kill him!" Jet explained.

"No, we're not killing Qibli. Why would you even think about doing that?"

"That son of a bitch rejected us, he's protecting Peacemaker, he's intelligent enough to be an actual threat to all of us, should I go

on?"

"Alright, alright! I'll think about it, but we're not making Rattlesnake do it if she doesn't want to!" Rattlesnake let out a sigh of relief.

"Yes!" Jet shouted, hopping away. Rattlesnake looked at BlackIce with a lot of uncertainty, and walked away too.

"She cares about her brother. She just doesn't want to admit it," BlackIce observed.

"Are you actually gonna think about it, or did you say that to shut Jet up?" Huntsman asked.

"I don't know. I don't downright hate Qibli, but I don't like him. Let's be logical about this. He spends about seventy percent of his time in Thorn's Stronghold: one of the most well-guarded places in Pyrrhia. He spends the other thirty percent of his time at Jade Mountain, and you know how that all went down last time. It got messy. I guess the only time we could catch him alone is when he's flying back and forth between the two places."

"That's not your usual approach. You've never been concerned about catching dragons alone."

"He has a lot of friends that would protect him. It would be a lot easier to catch him alone."

"BLACKICE!" Coldsnap shouted from the mouth of the cave. "WE GOT OURSELVES A VISITOR!" The IceWing came in with a black dragon with rainbow undersides of his wings.

"Oh, shit. Wasn't expecting to see you here. Who am I talking to right now?" BlackIce asked with a chill expression.

"Peacemaker. I'm not here to fight you. I just have a question," the hybrid said.

"Ask away."

"Do you know an IceWing named Firn?" Just the mention of the

name made BlackIce flinch. *How does he know him? Is he alive!? After all these years!?*

"Are you okay?" Huntsman whispered to him, snapping him out of his trance.

"Um, yeah. Yeah, I- I know him. Why do you ask?"

"He showed up at the school and started talking shit about my mother. And he said, 'BlackIce actually did something right for once.' He also had a bunch of cuts on his wrist." Peacemaker clearly noticed how uncomfortable this was making BlackIce, but obviously didn't care. BlackIce was too shocked to say anything. He never thought he would have to talk about Firn ever again. "BlackIce, I need some kind of info about him because if he's trying to kill me, this stuff is important."

"R- right. Of course, you do," BlackIce stuttered.

"What the hell!?" Jet shouted. "I thought that motherfucker was dead!"

"Kid, let's talk in private." BlackIce led Peacemaker to his own cave where he usually slept. He sat Peacemaker down in a chair in the corner. BlackIce sat on his bed. "I met Firn in a bar in the Ice Kingdom. He was a lot like me so we befriended each other pretty quickly. He was a very kind dragon with a good heart. At this point in life, I was a doctor so we didn't see each other much unless he came in because of an injury or he was sick (which didn't happen often). I mostly had to take care of wounded IceWings and a few wounded SandWings because this was a year or two after the beginning of the SandWing War. Even though hybrids were extremely uncommon back then, Queen Glacier always treated me kindly.

"I had been under so much stress that I accidentally lashed out at another doctor, so I lost the job. Firn was nice enough to let me stay with him and his girlfriend. I was there for a couple of years, but I was actively searching for work because I didn't want to be a burden. Queen Glacier recommended being an assassin for whatever reason. Not once had I ever shown any interest in wanting

to kill dragons, but I did it anyway because I was kind of desperate for work. She only sent me out to kill soldiers from other tribes that would be an actual threat to Blaze, and I kind of loved that job. I did it for fifteen years. I knew everyone's tricks. Even if I couldn't stealthily kill my target, I could fight pretty well, so they'd die either way.

"Firn wasn't very enthused with the job, however. I don't know what was going on inside his head at the time, but he got very bitter after he and his girlfriend got married. He took a lot of the anger out on me, which I allowed because I didn't want him to do that to his wife. Three years later, the war ended. A couple of days after, he got drunk and snapped at me, calling me a murderer and a monster. So I left and met Coldsnap, who was also an assassin for Glacier. We were both out of the job since the war had ended, but we didn't want it to be over. We had gone to Queen Glacier multiple times, asking if she had anyone for us to kill, and she always said no. So Coldsnap and I started to assassinate whomever we wanted within reason. The problem was that it wasn't exactly legal to do that. Especially since there's no war anymore. So we were wanted by the entire continent shortly after that. That's karma for you.

"Around that time, Firn also had a daughter who he loved very dearly. About six months later, after Coldsnap and I found more assassins for other tribes like Jet, Landslide, and Snakeroot, an IceWing plague started spreading, killing a bunch of them, including Glacier. It never affected me because I'm a hybrid, but Coldsnap got sick. But since I was a doctor, I knew how to help him fight it. Firn wasn't so fortunate. I rushed to his home to make sure they were alright, but by the time I got there, he was already cradling the bodies of his wife and daughter. There was blue blood on the ground because Firn started coughing it up. He told me to get out, but I stayed there because I wanted to help him. He refused so he could die and be with them, but he never did. The plague didn't last long. Since the plague didn't kill him, he tried killing himself on multiple occasions. Tried cutting his wrists, drowning himself, and jumping off cliffs. He just couldn't seem to die. Especially since I wouldn't let him die. Whenever I found him dying, I always helped him, no matter how angry it made him. I

wasn't ready to lose him.

"He eventually gave up, but that's when I realized I should have just let him die. He was absolutely losing it. The next time I went to visit him, he tried to kill me. He said if I had tried to kill Darkstalker, none of this would've happened. He obviously hadn't read any history scrolls because I knew Darkstalker had practically made himself immortal. There was nothing I could've done. But he didn't care. He started blaming me for everything. So... I stabbed him. I finally decided to leave him to die, filling me with nothing but guilt. Guilt for not trying to kill Darkstalker, guilt for not being able to save his wife and daughter, and guilt for leaving him to die. That's why I went after you. As soon as I heard who you were, I didn't hesitate to plan out how to kill you. But after I killed your mother, I knew what I was doing was horribly wrong. I saw your heartbroken eyes, and what I saw was a poor dragonet who lost his mother. I did exactly what Darkstalker did. I ripped apart a family. When you showed up in this cave a month later, I didn't see you as Peacemaker. I saw you as Darkstalker. I'm really sorry about your mother. I don't expect forgiveness. I just want you to understand."

Peacemaker looked down at the ground. He looked like he was feeling a million emotions all at once. "BlackIce?" Snakeroot popped his head in. "Qibli's here." Peacemaker's head popped up. BlackIce nodded at Snakeroot.

"Does he know you're here?" BlackIce asked Peacemaker. He shook his head. "Then stay here for a bit." BlackIce left his cave and ran to the main cave, where Qibli was standing angrily with Moon and an IceWing.

"What's up, Cactus-Butt?"

"BlackIce, where is he!?"

"Who?"

"Don't bullshit with me, where the hell is Peacemaker!?"

"How should I know?"

"He's definitely here," Moon said.

"Um... you have no proof of that," BlackIce said. He was struggling not to lose his cool.

"WHERE IS HE!?" Qibli shouted, grabbing him by the neck and raising his tail.

"Qibli, calm down!" Moon said.

"I can assure you..." BlackIce started. "...He's not here."

Something invisible grabbed the IceWing, pulling him away from Moon.

"Winter!" Moon shouted. Winter thrashed at the air around him as Snakeroot started materializing behind him with an arm around Winter's neck.

"You better stop moving or else you're gonna have some burns to clean up," he whispered to Winter. Moon looked at the cave behind BlackIce and he immediately knew she figured it out. She tried to go through the cave but Jet stopped her.

"Nuh uh! I don't think so!" Moon sighed. She looked at him and a smirk creeped up her mouth.

"You think Rattlesnake is hot," she said.

"WHAT!? NO NO NO NO!" The others were snickering as he ran over to Rattlesnake. "IT'S NOT TRUE, I SWEAR! SHE'S JUST TRYING TO EMBARASS ME!" BlackIce saw Moon run through the cave to where Peacemaker was. *Ah shit.*

"Qibli, I'm not gonna kill you, but if you don't let me go, I'm gonna rip off your jaw, wear it as a hat, then break your nose." Qibli inched his tail closer to his throat.

"I GOT HIM!" Moon shouted from the cave. She came out with Peacemaker under her wing.

"You go anywhere near him again, I'll kill you," Qibli said, shoving

BlackIce away.

"Calm down. He didn't kidnap me. I came here willingly," Peacemaker said. "I didn't tell you because I knew you wouldn't let me."

"Damn right. What's he done to you? Has he hurt you?"

"No, no. He hasn't done anything to me at all," Peacemaker said. BlackIce nodded at Snakeroot to let Winter go, but he must've misunderstood because he sprayed two drops of venom onto the IceWing's shoulder.

"Goddamn it, Snakeroot! I meant for you to let him go!" Winter roared in pain, kicking Snakeroot away and clawing at his shoulder. Moon rushed to his side as he finished clawing it all off, blue blood pouring out. Qibli rushed to his side too, leaving Peacemaker standing alone. BlackIce hastily got to Peacemaker's side. "Hey, if Firn hassles you more, let me know," he whispered. Peacemaker nodded.

"Hey, get away from him!" Qibli shouted. BlackIce backed away from the dragonet.

"He wasn't doing anything to me, Qibli!" Peacemaker said. Winter stood up with Moon clutching his shoulder.

"I'm fine, Moon," he said reassuringly.

"BlackIce, if you go anywhere near Peacemaker again, you're dead," Qibli growled.

"Fair." They left with Winter clutching his shoulder and Moon with a wing around him and Qibli ushering Peacemaker out. BlackIce heard Jet still trying to explain to Rattlesnake that Moon was wrong.

"Are you alright?" Huntsman asked the hybrid.

"I don't know. I never thought Firn would do something like this. This whole thing has been really shocking."

"You'll figure it out, love. You always do." She kissed his cheek and walked away, leaving the hybrid alone with his thoughts. Coldsnap passed him to guard the entrance again. Landslide didn't pay attention to anything that was happening. He was busy changing the bandage around his eye. Snakeroot was busy cleaning a little bit of venom that splashed onto him from Winter. He was practically impervious to venom because of how much he's been hit by it. Jet was still freaking out, and Rattlesnake was just sitting there, blushing and clearly embarrassed by what Moon said. BlackIce took a deep breath.

I'll figure it out, he thought, *I always do.*

Don't Use That Bullshit

"NO! YOU CAN'T MAKE ME GO!" Tsunami shouted as Turtle and Auklet were dragging her. She was thrashing around, trying to make them let her go. The sun was setting so they really had to leave soon.

"We're *all* going, whether we like it or not," Auklet said. She slipped free but was stopped by Clay.

"Tsunami, you haven't seen your mother in months," he said. "I'm sure she'd be overjoyed to see you."

"YEAH, AND I'LL BE OVERJOYED TO *NOT* SEE HER!"

Auklet looked behind Clay and saw Cliff looking at the ground. She slipped past Clay and wrapped her wings tightly around him. He stood stiff, clearly shocked by that. He slowly put his own wings around her. "Are you sure you don't want me to come with you?"

"I'm not sure at all. But I don't ever want Coral to do anything to you. Not that I'd let her, but I can't take that risk. If anything happened to you, I don't know what I'd do with myself." She placed her head on his shoulder and she could feel him tremoring slightly. "Are you okay? You're shaking."

"Ha, yeah! I- I'm just... cold," he said.

"Actually, you're really warm. Like... more than normal." Auklet knew exactly why he was doing this, but she didn't want to say anything to embarrass him. She didn't know exactly how she felt about him. He was really sweet, and Auklet adored him, but she was scared of relationships, especially because of her mother. If they were ever together, her mother would freak out, or worse: try to kill him. She already got pissed off about Anemone being in love with a RainWing, but if it's a SkyWing, she would definitely kill him.

"Are *you* okay? You're hugging me really tight," Cliff said. Auklet snapped out of her thoughts and let him go, but Cliff didn't let her go yet. "Oh, I never said it bothered me."

Auklet buried her face in his chest. She could hear his heartbeat get faster. "I'll miss you," she said. With his wings around her, she felt safe and like she would never be lost.

"Auklet, it's time to go," Turtle said gently behind her.

"Let's not and say we did," she said.

"Are you *suuuuuure* you don't want me to come with?" Cliff teased.

"Coral would destroy you," Turtle joked.

"You'd think she'd be over the Summer Palace," Cliff said.

"She is. Well... no, not really. But she's mostly angry about them kidnapping her husband and killing him. Well, Scarlet technically didn't kill him. Tsunami did. But she didn't know, and she was forced to fight him in Scarlet's arena. Tsunami is pretty sensitive about it, so don't ask her about it," Turtle explained. Auklet finally pulled away and looked Cliff in the eyes. She always thought his golden-orange eyes were pretty, but now, with the sunset reflecting off of them, they were absolutely beautiful. She affectionately pressed her snout to his and he finally unwrapped his wings, a huge blush forming on his face.

"I'll see you soon. As soon as I can leave the Sea Kingdom, I'm gonna spend the rest of the break in the Sky Kingdom with you," Auklet said, pulling her snout away from him. She followed Turtle, waving to Cliff one more time, and they took off with Tsunami.

They flew silently for the most part. Tsunami occasionally cursed their mother out, which was to be expected. But after a long moment of silence, Turtle said, "sooo... you and Cliff?"

The question startled Auklet, making her lose her flight pattern. "Wh- what!? No, of course not!"

"Come on, you're not subtle. It's just us three. You can talk about it,"

Turtle said, brushing her wings with his.

"I- it's complicated. I don't quite know how I feel about him. I care deeply for him, but... I don't know if I love him. I mean, I love him, but I don't. Does that make sense?" Auklet explained.

"Nope," Tsunami said.

"Yeah, I understand. Kinkajou was the same with me for a while. We're still not entirely sure what we wanna do. We love each other, but... we're not dating. We're not really ready for it yet," Turtle explained. Auklet looked at the ground far below them. She was constantly thinking about the SkyWing. His incredibly sweet, but nervous personality. His beautiful eyes. His handsome face...

Where the hell did that come from? She shook her head, trying to get those thoughts out. Think about other things! Think about seeing Anemone again. *Think about seeing Mother again and how it's gonna be the most painful couple of days ever.*

"If it makes you feel any better, we won't tell Mother about him," Turtle assured her.

"Thanks," she said. In the distance, they could see the beach, and the Bay of a Thousand Scales. They landed on the beach and Tsunami grabbed a talonful of sand and threw it into the ocean. A small pile of it ended up pouring on her head. Auklet stifled her laughter, and Turtle was busy looking at a weird looking crab.

"Can we leave and come back another day?" Tsunami asked.

"I wish," Auklet grumbled. She dove into the water and all the fish around her scurried away. Turtle and Tsunami joined her a second later. Auklet knew the way you the Deep Palace, but she was almost tempted to pretend she forgot so Turtle and Tsunami could waste their time trying to lead her so that they could be late and not have to see mother. It was an unnecessarily complicated plan, but it could work. *"I can't remember the way to the Deep-"* Auklet flashed in Aquatic.

"Don't use that bullshit," Tsunami flashed back.

Fuck. They swam the path they normally take, and the palace came into view. In the front entrance, they spotted a SeaWing swimming back and forth. She had pink on her wings, and Auklet recognized her immediately. She tried to yell Anemone's name out loud, but she inhaled a lot of water into her mouth instead of her gills, causing her to choke for a couple seconds. Tsunami and Turtle started laughing, muffled by the water. Anemone noticed them and her face lit up, literally and figuratively. Auklet swam into her and wrapped her wings around her sister.

"It's great to see you!" Anemone flashed. She hugged Turtle and Tsunami too. Turtle smiled, but Tsunami was still angry about having to be here.

"Alright, can we leave now?" Tsunami flashed.

"Stop asking," Turtle flashed back.

"Aww, not happy to see me?" Anemone joked.

"It's not you that I'm pissed about." Anemone nodded.

"Well, she sure is excited to see you three. She kept asking me when you'd be here as if I know. It was fucking annoying. Anyways, she's not in the palace right now. She's on one of the biggest islands because she said, and I quote, 'I want to hear their beautiful voices again.'"

Tsunami groaned but Turtle laughed. Anemone started treading up and the others followed. They all poked their heads to the surface and swam to the nearest island.

"I am *not* used to breathing salt water," Auklet said, rubbing her gills.

"Ditto," Tsunami grumbled. Anemone hugged Turtle and Tsunami briefly before an excited, booming voice shouts out.

"MY DAUGHTERS!" Their mother landed next to them and wrapped her wings around all of them. "I've missed you all so much!"

"Y- yeah! Missed you too!" Auklet said.

"And I miss being far away from here," Tsunami mumbled quietly.

"Auklet, I have excellent news for you!" Their mother said. Auklet's ears perked up as Coral let them go. Slight excitement started building up in Auklet. She lowered her head to Auklet's eye level. "I have arranged a marriage for you with Trench for when you're older!"

WHAT THE FUCK!!?? I NEVER AGREED TO THAT!!

"Trench!? From school!?" Auklet asked.

"Mother!" Anemone shouted, outraged. "You said no more arranged marriages, especially after what happened with Whirlpool!"

"But Trench is so sweet! I can assure you he's not gonna try to assassinate any of you."

Auklet buried her face in her talons and Turtle put a wing around her.

"Ah, there he is!" A green SeaWing with an earring in each ear landed behind them. He had the most punchable face and cheeky smile.

"Hello your majesties," he said. He gave a low bow. He looked up with just his eyes, mostly up at Auklet.

"Were you following us?" Tsunami demanded.

"Loosely. As the queen requested of me." The others looked back at their mother who put on an innocent smile. "So nice to finally get to talk to you, Princess Auklet." He raised his head and winked at her. "It's very difficult when you spend so much time with that SkyWing."

"Oh, uh-"

"SkyWing? What SkyWing?" Coral demanded, her smile disappearing.

"I- it's no one! Just a friend!"

"I thought we said you wouldn't make friends with any SkyWings."

"No, we didn't say anything. You did. That aside, you can't just force me to marry anyone, especially someone I barely know. What if there's someone else that I love? I want to be with someone who makes me happy. Is that too much to ask?" Auklet ranted.

"*Is* there someone?" Coral asked skeptically.

"W- well, maybe."

"Bad idea," Tsunami whispered.

"Is it this SkyWing?" Coral growled.

"No! Of course not! That's a funny joke, though! I guess there isn't *really* anyone currently. But maybe someday. And it sure as hell won't be some random SeaWing that you picked out for me. No offense," Auklet added quickly.

"Already offended," Trench muttered.

"Auklet, this is a safe way to ensure there will be heirs," Coral explained.

"What about Tsunami and Riptide?" Anemone asked.

"Ha! Like I'd ever let any offspring of that sea slug be an heir!" Tsunami let out a loud growl, but Coral seemed unphased by it. "Tsunami, you know how I feel about him."

"Yeah, because you make it *very* clear whenever I see you." Tsunami growled.

"Your highness!" Another SeaWing who Auklet recognized landed in front of them, kicking sand at them.

"Shark, how'd it go?" Coral asked, shaking sand off her talons.

"The troops are prepared for the atta-"

"NO!" Coral interrupted. She subtly shook her head at him, shutting

him up. They all turned to Coral, except for Trench because he seemed to be having a staring contest with a seagull behind Coral

"Finish that sentence, Shark," Anemone said. Shark kept his mouth shut. "Mother, what are you two planning?"

"It doesn't matter, Dear. It doesn't concern any of you."

"I think it does because I'm certainly concerned," Tsunami said. "Don't try to hide this from us. We've already figured out you're up to something."

"We can talk about it later," Coral sighed.

"Or we could talk about it now," Auklet said.

"Ohmygod, we're attacking the SkyWings tomorrow night!" Coral blurted. They all went silent. Even Trench turned to look at them. The waves even seemed to quiet down.

"That's an act of war," Turtle said.

"Have you forgotten what they've done to us?" Coral growled. "Destroying the Summer Palace. MURDERING YOUR FATHER!!" Tsunami opened her mouth, but no words came out. Auklet had a fair idea of what she wanted to say, but she understood. Telling your mother that you killed your father isn't exactly an easy thing to bring up.

"That was during the war! Not to mention, that was all Scarlet's fault father died! Not Ruby! And it was Burn's orders to attack the Summer Palace!" Tsunami objected. Then the sudden realization that Cliff would be in danger hit Auklet like a mallet to the face.

"Enough!" Coral took a deep breath. "Now. It's getting late. I want you all to sleep. We've got a big day tomorrow." The others started following her, but Auklet didn't. She grabbed Turtle's arm.

"I gotta go," she whispered. "I have to warn the SkyWings. I can't let Mother do this to them. If there's even a small chance I can save most of them, I have to try."

"Let me come with you. I have a close relationship with the SkyWings," Turtle said.

"This isn't gonna be like a friendly visit."

"I know. But I have friends there. I don't want any of them killed." Auklet sighed. She noticed that Tsunami and Anemone were listening in.

"We'll stay behind and distract Mother," Anemone said. Auklet wrapped her wings around Anemone and Tsunami and flew off with Turtle quickly before Coral noticed. The moons were glowing brightly. There was a full moon, while the others were half full.

"I can't believe this," Auklet said under her breath.

"I sure hope Ruby will be there. I don't know what we'll do if she isn't," Turtle said. Auklet was silently panicking now. If Coral found out they warned the SkyWings, she'd probably disown them. But that was the least of her worries. She was worried that if Coral found out, she'd target Cliff and do something to him.

"WAIT!" Someone shouted behind them. They stopped and saw green scales flying towards them. "Hold on! Lemme come with you!"

"We'll pass," Auklet said. Trench frowned. "Look, you're nice, but I'm not marrying you. I refuse to marry anyone Mother picks out for me. She has horrible judgment with this kind of stuff."

"Good," Trench sighed with relief. "I have a boyfriend who I love dearly. I only acted that way before so the queen wouldn't get pissed off. Sorry if I made you uncomfortable. Just needed to make sure she really bought it." Auklet sighed and nodded. She made a "come on" gesture with her head. They flew off, each of them worried about what's to come.

A Long Day

"In here. Now," Qibli said, forcing Peacemaker into the room he slept in at Thorn's Stronghold, shutting the door. Moon had rushed Winter to the healers for his arm.

"Alright, lay it on me," Peacemaker sighed.

"What the hell were you thinking?" Qibli's typical chill personality disappeared completely and was replaced with... frustration? Peacemaker couldn't tell if he was actually angry or not.

"Well... I'm thinking that you're overreacting a bit."

"Why would you WILLINGLY go talk to BlackIce!? You're lucky he didn't kill you!"

"I'd say Winter is the lucky one. He didn't get killed by Snakeroot."

"I'm not joking around!"

"Neither am I. Snakeroot's aim was a bit off."

"TAKE THIS SERIOUSLY!" Peacemaker flinched. He'd never heard Qibli be this upset. "Your mother sacrificed herself for you. Don't waste it by talking with her killer."

"OH! Isn't that rich!? Using my mother to win a stupid argument! Trying to *fucking* guilt trip me! That's amazing! But you know what? I don't care anymore!" Peacemaker just realized what he was saying, but he found he didn't care. It was one of those random bursts of anger that Mink usually diffused, but he felt that even if she was there, he wouldn't stop.

"Now, hold on-"

"Why the hell couldn't you have just killed Darkstalker!?"

Um... ouch?

"Hey, if we didn't do what we did, you wouldn't be alive," Qibli said.

"And!? Just by being alive, I put all of you in danger because you keep putting yourself in between me and whatever is trying to kill me! And it's not that I don't appreciate it, but I can't ask you to keep doing it! I know you promised my mother, but I don't care anymore! I don't want you to protect me anymore! I can't let any of you get killed!"

"Well, you clearly need my protection. You went to go speak with BlackIce."

"Stop dragging him into this! He never even attempted to kill me! He actually seemed scared when I mentioned Firn. He told me about his little backstory that wasn't really necessary. But I did learn one thing. Darkstalker deserved to die. Mother never should have sacrificed herself for me! I see her every single time I dream and I wake up feeling guilty every single morning! It's only a matter of time before one of you gets killed for me! I put everyone in danger just by existing! Every day, I think that I should leave that school! Every day, I get bullied at that school just because of who I am! I get told to leave the school constantly, but one of the teachers always defends me! But something Crayfish and Fennec were saying keeps going through my head constantly. Ever since I've been to that school, some life threatening event keeps happening. The only reason I've stayed is because my friends keep begging me to. And it's not that I don't love the school. But I can't keep putting those students in danger. If BlackIce *did* kill me, would it really be *that* bad? At least the rest of you would be safe. Firn wouldn't be hunting me. You and Moon can live happy lives together without any fear of someone storming this place just to kill me-"

"And Mink and your friends would be horribly depressed," Qibli interrupted. That's where things got difficult. He didn't want them to be depressed, but they would be safer. He turned to leave, but Qibli stopped him by grabbing his arm. "Where're you going?"

"Away."

"Peacemaker, there's no way I'm gonna let you kill yourself. You may think that's what's best, but it's not. There are many dragons who care about you. We don't just protect you because your mother asked us to. We do it because you're family to us. You're selfless, and I admire that about you. But think about yourself for once. You don't deserve this. You deserve to live a long, happy life."

"I wasn't going to kill myself," Peacemaker said, pulling away. "I just... need to be alone." He opened the door and saw a lot of SandWings, Moon, Winter, and Mink who were listening in on the conversation. Mink looked like she was crying. She reached for him, but he backed up a small bit. He ran past her, pushing through the crowd of SandWings.

"Peacemaker!" Qibli shouted. Not in anger, but in worry. But that didn't matter in the slightest to Peacemaker. When he reached the outdoors, he immediately took off. He looked back for a second, seeing Qibli try to follow him but getting grabbed by Moon.

Got any plans, genius?

I'll probably just go to Possibility. It's crowded, so no one would try to kill me.

Right. But it's a great place for murderers to find you and then wait for you to be alone.

Such a downer.

SAYS YOU! Did you hear yourself talking to Qibli? You're so fucking dramatic all the time now.

I don't wanna hear it.

Thankfully, Possibility was very close to Thorn's Stronghold, so he didn't have to fly very far. He landed in the crowded streets, bumping into a couple other dragons. He heard multiple murmurs about him.

"Holy crap, it's Darkstalker!"

"Beautiful wings."

"Wasn't he the one everyone was talking about?"

He roamed around for a bit. He knew his way around fairly well because of all the time he spent here with Mink. It was quite a bit different than it was all those years ago. There were more buildings, more dragons, more crowded.

Hey, wanna get a drink?

A drink?

Sure! Take your mind off of everything for awhile!

Oh, I don't know. Never been a fan of alcohol.

Have you ever actually had any?

No, but... I've heard what it can do to dragons.

Oh, please. You're the last dragon I'd expect to be an aggressive drunk. Firn has some shit wrong with him. Of course he'd be an asshole.

Peacemaker sighed, sitting at a nearby bench. He stared at the ground, wondering when she should head back. He almost jumped out of his scales when he felt someone poke his wings from behind. He looked behind him and saw a little SeaWing dragonet looking up at him.

"What are you?"

"Night-Rain hybrid," Peacemaker sighed.

"Mommy says hybrids are horribly disfigured abominations that should all be executed. I don't know what three of those words mean, but they sound important," he said.

Kill him.

Shut up. I'm not killing a child.

"Well, your mother seems wonderful. Speaking of her, you should

probably go find her now. She's probably worried sick," Peacemaker said. He just wanted to be alone. Was that too much to ask for?

"No, she left only a week after I was hatched. My daddy told me she was a... I think the word was 'hole.'"

"I... don't think that's the word," Peacemaker said. The dragonet poked his wing again. It was getting frustrating, but he didn't have the heart to tell him to leave. He also knew he had very unusual wings, so naturally, he'd be curious. But the dragonet would *not stop.* He reached up to scratch his head, and the dragonet flinched. "What?"

"I thought you were going to slap me," he said, looking embarrassed.

"Why would I do that?"

"Because my daddy does it all the time when he's drunk. So I expect it from others too." Peacemaker felt a jab in his heart.

Okay, let's kill his dad.

I'm not killing anyone.

Oh, come on! He abuses his kid! The asshole deserves it!

Since when do you care about the life of some random dragonet?

Do you forget that I, too, had an abusive father?

I'm not killing him.

Rrrrr. You're no fun.

"Where's your dad?" He asked.

"Where he always is. At a bar. Probably drunk."

"I AM NOT!" An adult SeaWing stumbled in front of them, carrying a beer bottle, and the dragonet immediately got under Peacemaker's wing. "Come on, you little brat! We're going home!"

"Shouldn't you sober up a bit before going anywhere?"

"SHUT UP! GIMME MY KID!"

"Hey, I don't want you to hurt him!" He suddenly smashed the bottle over Peacemaker's head, and it felt as if he was just shoved into the back of his brain.

Oh no!

HAHA! YES!

"HEY! What's going on here!?" A SandWing landed between them. He saw the glass shards on the ground and the broken bottle in the SeaWing's claws. The SandWing sighed. "Really Breeze? Again?" Darkstalker kept his wing around the dragonet to Peacemaker's surprise.

"THAT SON OF A BITCH KIDNAPPED MY SON!"

"What!? No no no, he came to me and hid under my wing when his dumbass father came over here because he abuses him when he's drunk," Darkstalker said. He placed his talon on his head where the SeaWing smashed the bottle, and he noticed that blood was seeping out. Peacemaker could feel the dragonet tremoring.

"THAT'S BULLSHIT!" Breeze tried lunging at Darkstalker, but the SandWing stopped him.

"He's never mentioned having a dragonet," the SandWing said. "Does he hurt you, kid?" The dragonet nodded, tears streaming down. "Alright. Breeze, you know the drill."

"God fucking dammit! How long is my sentence?" Breeze asked, getting on the ground. The SandWing crouched over him and started tying up his talons.

"Well, considering you're going for assault and child abuse, that's fifteen years."

"WHAT!? YOU'RE NOT JUST KEEPING ME OVERNIGHT LIKE USUAL!?"

"F- fifteen years?" the dragonet squeaked. "W- what do I do? I have no other family."

"I can take you to Queen Thorn and she can help you find someone, whether it's a relative or someone who can take care of you." The dragonet looked up at Darkstalker for a couple seconds, but then nodded. The SandWing picked up Breeze and flew off. The dragonet was still tremoring, but followed, leaving Darkstalker and Peacemaker alone.

I never thought you'd be protective of that dragonet.

I don't take kindly to abuse. Anyways, whatta you say? Round two with BlackIce?

NO! How could you still want to kill him?

Heyyyy, I was joking!

I thought jokes were supposed to be funny.

Uncalled for.

Pain finally started to build up in his head as all the adrenaline faded. Darkstalker started applying pressure to the wound, trying to make the bleeding stop. After a short while, it did stop, but he was feeling dizzy and almost fell over when trying to stand. He got weird looks from the passing dragons.

He looked up and saw a familiar dragon flying overhead. An earring was shining bright in the sun.

That's Qibli!

Are you sure? Lots of dragons wear earrings.

Yes! Hide!

Darkstalker sighed and stood back up.

Where the hell do I hide?

I don't know! In a crowd? An alley?

Well, considering you'd stick out in a crowd, we're gonna go with an alley.

He rushed into the nearest empty alleyway. Darkstalker folded his wings in.

Curse your damn wings. Why'd that stupid RainWing have to make me half RainWing? Anything else would've been fine!

Shush! Moon might be with him.

The SandWing landed, and, sure enough, it was Qibli, but no Moon. He started talking to a couple of other dragons, most likely asking if anyone had seen Peacemaker. Darkstalker noticed an oddly familiar looking SandWing eyeing Qibli. They suddenly looked Darkstalker directly in the eyes, causing him to flinch. The SandWing looked back at Qibli, and started speed walking to him.

I don't like this at all!

Okay. What am I supposed to do?

Stop them!

He was too late. The SandWing grabbed Qibli by the shoulders and stabbed their tail straight through his stomach. There were screams ripping through the air. If Peacemaker could, he would be one of them. They ripped their tail out, looked at Darkstalker again, and took off.

KNOCK YOURSELF OUT!

What? Why?

I NEED TO SEE HIM! HE'S DYING BECAUSE OF ME!

How do you know it's because of you? Maybe someone just held a grudge against him.

REGARDLESS, I'M THE REASON HE EVEN CAME OUT HERE!

Darkstalker growled a bit and looked at an empty beer bottle lying on the ground, picking it up.

Son of a bitch. You owe me.

He smashed the bottle over his head and Peacemaker got thrust back into his brain. He shook his head dizzily and ran over to Qibli, who had a crowd around him. "Out of the way! OUT OF THE WAY!" He shouted, shoving past everyone. Numerous SandWings were pushing the crowd back.

"Kid, we need you to stay back," a SandWing said, holding his wing up to block Peacemaker.

"NO! LET ME THROUGH! QIBLI!"

"Come on, man. No need to be a hardass. Just let him through," Qibli rasped. The SandWing sighed and moved his wing. Peacemaker crouched to side of Qibli's head. His eyes were so filled with tears that he could hardly see. "Hey bud. You're head is bleeding."

"Qibli, please don't leave me," Peacemaker cried.

"Ohh, I'll be fine." Qibli let out a cough and blood splattered on the ground beside his head. "Well, bloody coughs aren't usually a good sign."

"C- can't we stop the bleeding!?" Peacemaker cried. "Cauterize it or something?"

"If we do that, we can't get the venom out," a SandWing said.

"WELL, JUST SITTING ON YOUR ASS AND DOING NOTHING ISN'T GETTING THE VENOM OUT!"

"Kid, we have someone coming with a brightsting cactus." Qibli spat out more blood.

"Ohh, I don't know. Might be losing a bit too much blood right now," he said.

I don't think he's gonna make it.

Something was different about Darkstalker's voice. For once, he didn't sound frustrated or bored, or sarcastic. For once, he almost sounded like he was trying to comfort him in a low, soft voice.

"Qibli, please stay with me. I can't lose you too," Peacemaker cried. "WHY DON'T ANY OF YOU HAVE A BRIGHTSTING WITH YOU!? YOU'RE ALL IN THE DESERT KINGDOM FOR FUCK'S SAKE!"

"Hey, calm down," Qibli said softly. His breathing was starting to slow down. He took one of Peacemaker's talons in his own and tried to lift his head slightly. "You're a good kid. I've known you since you were 'created' and I couldn't be happier with how you turned out. And tell Moon I love her. I know that's a cliché, but I'm running out of things to say because I'm not dying as quickly as I thought I would and I'm running out of breath."

"Then save it," Peacemaker said. "And you should tell Moon yourself."

Qibli coughed out more blood. He laid his head back stared at the sky. His breathing suddenly slowed down and his eyes glazed over.

"Qibli?" No answer. "Qibli!" Still no answer.

"I'm here!" A MudWing shouted, pushing past everyone. "Sorry I'm late, the SandWing who told me there was someone dying in the middle of the street failed to realize that this is a city and is about ninty percent street." Peacemaker lifted Qibli's head and shook it.

"Qibli, could you please just wake up and talk to me?" Peacemaker refused to believe this was happening. Tears were streaming down his face, dripping onto Qibli. He held Qibli's head close, sobbing.

"Ah, shit. I was way too late. Sorry kid," the MudWing said.

"Don't worry about it, Mayfly. The venom was spreading fast and he was losing too much blood. I don't know if you would've been able to save him even if you had gotten here on time," a SandWing said.

"Alright, my time has been wasted. I'll see you all later!" The

MudWing ran off. The group began to split up, but a couple of SandWings stayed.

Peacemaker pressed Qibli's head against his own. "I'm sorry. I'm so so sorry," he sobbed. He felt a wing gently wrap around him and he flinched.

"We need to bring the body to Queen Thorn. She's... gonna want to see this," a gentle female voice said. "If you want, you can come with us."

Peacemaker looked up at her, but past her head, he saw the familiar SandWing standing atop a building, looking down at them. Their tail was slightly hanging off the side of the building, and it was stained with blood. When they noticed Peacemaker looking at them, they took off. "No, I got something else I need to do." He took off after the SandWing. When they were out of Possibility, the SandWing seemed to be scanning the ground. Peacemaker inhaled deep and shot a fireball at the SandWing. It hit them directly in the wing and they fell and land with a painful-sounding thud in the sand. Peacemaker landed behind them and slammed them back on the ground when they tried to get back up. He turned them on their back and grabbed their throat to see their face. "Fennec!?"

"Hey, twerp," she choked out. She grabbed a talonful of sand and threw it in Peacemaker's face, making him stumble back. She growled as she looked at her wing. "Now I won't be able to fly for a while."

Peacemaker was about to lunge at her, but a strong force rammed into him. He skided through the sand, scraping against anything that was in the sand. When he stopped, he stood back up and looked at what slammed into him. "You've gotta be shitting me! Firn!?"

"I'd say that plan worked perfectly. Whatta you say, Fennec?" Firn gloated.

"Went great." Firn tossed Fennec a pouch of what Peacemaker suspected was coins.

"Better scooch."

"Nah, I wanna watch this."

"Suit yourself." Before he could do anything, Firn grabbed Peacemaker and slammed him to the ground, and pinned him down. He made a tear in one of Peacemaker's wings. One blow to his face and he got pushed to the back of his mind. Darkstalker caught on immediately and slashed Firn's chest, and he hardly flinched even as blue blood spilled out. He wrapped his claws around Darkstalker's throat. "You in there Darkstalker!?"

Remember what you did to Landslide?

That's really gonna piss him off.

Either that, or we die!

THEN DO IT!

Darkstalker reached up and Firn caught his wrist. Another blow to the face. Peacemaker got pushed back into the front of his mind. Everything was going blurry. He couldn't breathe, he could barely move. Once everything started going dark, a blast of fire knocked Firn off of him. Everything came back to him as he gasped and coughed. At first, he thought Fennec had saved him for some reason, but a black and white figure landed in front of him. "BlackIce?"

"HAHA! SON OF A BITCH, I MISSED YOU!" Firn said, getting back up.

"How'd you know we were here?" Peacemaker asked, getting up.

"I was flying by and Firn is loud," BlackIce replied. "So, this is what you're resorting to? Murdering a dragonet?"

"Don't come at me with that, you goddamn hypocrite," Firn said. "If I recall, you, too, tried to kill him."

"I know what I did was wrong. This isn't what Borealis would want."

"Who cares what she wants? She's dead," Firn growled.

Peacemaker noticed Fennec slowly backing away. Peacemaker was about to grab her, but BlackIce stopped him, holding him with his wings "Whoa, hey. Calm down." Peacemaker thrashed, trying to break free.

"SHE NEEDS TO DIE!"

"Why? What'd she do?"

"She did what she was paid to do," Firn said. "Did it quite well, too."

"Peacemaker, what did she do?" BlackIce asked in a surprisingly gentle tone.

"It doesn't matter, just let me go!"

"Not until you tell me what she did!"

"SHE KILLED QIBLI!" He stopped thrashing and started crying against BlackIce.

"You paid her to do that?" BlackIce asked Firn, looking up at him.

"Boo fucking hoo. He'll get over it." Peacemaker turned around and growled. He started inhaling deep. "Ooooh gonna shoot fire at me?"

"Peacemaker, calm down," BlackIce whispered. Once Peacemaker inhaled as deeply as he could, he shot a giant black fireball. Firn dodged it, but it hit Fennec directly in the chest. She screamed as it started completely melting her scales. She dropped dead very quickly as it kept burning until you could see her ribs, and even then, it started burning through them. Her mouth was wide open, and her eyes were also wide open. BlackIce let him go and stepped back a bit. "Holy shit," he muttered.

What the fuck did you just do!?

I- I don't know!

Firn stared at him. His eyes were full of fear, confusion, and anger.

He backed up and flew away. Peacemaker's throat was burning slightly, sort of like how it felt when you throw up. Speaking of which, Peacemaker felt like he was going to, looking at Fennec's decimated body. No blood was spilling out, and her ribs were stained mahogany. There were holes in her lungs, you could even see her heart completely still. Her claws were twitching slightly. He had to look away before he threw up.

BlackIce crouched by the body, looking at the "flame" that Peacemaker shot out. "I've never seen anything like this," he said. "You should come check this out."

"N- no, I'm okay." He was on the verge of puking, the image of Fennec's body reappearing in his head over and over again.

Just let it out. You'll feel better afterwards.

"Hey, if you're gonna puke, can you do it somewhere else?" BlackIce said.

"Why?"

"So I don't have to watch." Before he could go somewhere else, the dam broke, the disgusting taste filling his mouth. "Or don't. That's fine too."

Peacemaker spat out the last of it and groaned.

That was gross.

Thanks for that observation.

Peacemaker sat on a nearby rock, staring down at the ground. His eyes started filling up with tears as he started thinking about Qibli. Before he knew it, he started sobbing again.

"Hey, do you think you can shoot some more of that stuff!? I want a sample of it! There's no more leftover here!" BlackIce called. "Oh shit, you're crying. Never mind! Maybe I should bring you back to Moon!"

"What!? Nonono, I couldn't bare to see her heartbroken face when

she finds out about Qibli! You can't even begin to think about how much guilt I'm feeling right now, and seeing Moon would just make it worse."

"And she'd be worried sick about you," BlackIce said. "Is it worth scaring her just because you're feeling a little guilty?"

He's got a point.

Peacemaker clutched his head, finally noticing how hard he was tremoring. He didn't know what to do. BlackIce crouched in front of him. "You know your nose is bleeding, right?" Peacemaker felt his nose and his claw was stained with blood. "What's your plan exactly? Running away from your problems?"

"Hey, how were you able inspect that body without feeling sick?"

"I was a doctor in the middle of a war. I saw some gruesome shit. But don't dodge the question. What exactly is your plan?"

"I'll make it up as I go."

"That's not a plan. I'll let you stay with us until you decide what you wanna do."

"No! That's the first place Moon would go looking for me! And you couldn't ever lie to her, no matter how hard you try!"

"Peacemaker, calm down. We'll figure it out." Peacemaker looked back at Fennec's body.

Stop looking at it. It's making you feel worse.

I don't think it's possible for me to feel worse.

He knew that staying with BlackIce would be the safest place for him, but he didn't want him to be in the same danger that Qibli and Foeslayer (and probably Moon) were in.

Peacemaker, in the nicest way possible, you need to stop being so selfless for a second. He's offering you safety and I think you should take it.

By risking his own safety!

"I don't know," he said.

"Hm. Well, what does Darkstalker say?" BlackIce asked.

You better tell him the truth or else I'm gonna make your life even more of a living hell.

Peacemaker sighed. "He agrees with you."

"Great! Two to one! We should get going, it's getting late." The sun was going down. The sky was beautifully orange, with a bit of purple and magenta.

Auklet, Tsunami, and Turtle should be leaving by now.

"I can't fly there," Peacemaker said, lifting his torn wing up.

"Then we can walk. We're not far. We can probably get there in about... an hour. Let's get going," BlackIce said. They started their walk.

Hey, Darkstalker?

Hm?

Remember when you said that I owe you for letting me talking to Qibli?

Yeah?

What do I owe you?

A short pause.

Don't worry about it, kid. Just make sure you get somewhere safe. I'm sure BlackIce will fix your wing in a heartbeat.

Well... thank you.

For?

For letting me talk to Qibli before he... you know. It just... means a lot to

me.

Yeah, yeah. Don't expect anything else like that. I just thought I'd let you do that since you couldn't with mother.

The sun had gone down and the three moons were above their heads. Peacemaker was getting really tired, and he needed sleep.

Almost there. This has been a long day.

That's what was amazing about Qibli

"Did you see the way he looked at me? There was no trust in his eyes at all," Mink sobbed, leaning against Winter, who had his wings around her. "I never should have ratted him out. I was just so worried about him."

"Hey, he's alive because you ratted him out," Winter reassured her.

"I don't know about that," Moon said. "BlackIce never even thought about hurting or killing Peacemaker. I don't think he was in any danger."

"Regardless, there was no way we could've known that," Winter said.

Moon's ears perked up. "Excuse me. Thorn is calling me," she said, walking off.

"I should probably get going too," Winter said. "I've kinda got a whole town to take care of."

"This late? Can't Riptide take care of it for right now?" Mink asked.

"Well, that's not really fair to him."

"Please stay? At least until Peacemaker comes back?" Winter sighed and nodded. A SandWing ran past them. They didn't think much of it until another did, and another and another and another. There was a lot of muttering, and then one scream. Winter seemed to recognize it immediately.

"Moon!?" They followed the SandWings until they got into the middle of a large crowd of them. "Moon!" Winter called again, shoving through the crowd. Mink tried to follow, but there were

way too many dragons. It took her a couple of minutes to get to the front, where she found Moon sobbing over a pale yellow body lying on the ground with Winter wrapping a wing around her.

Nononononono!

She looked at the body and felt sick to her stomach. Not because it was bloody, but because of who it was. Mink looked at Winter, who looked like he was trying hard not to cry, while Moon had her head pressed against Qibli's, sobbing hard.

"Everyone out of the way!" That was Queen Thorn.

"Moon," Winter choked, trying to pull her away for Thorn.

"NO!" Moon cried, pushing Winter away. When Thorn reached the center of the crowd, she crouched on the opposite side of Mink. She gently put a talon on Moon's shoulder. She looked up at Thorn and got pulled into a hug by her. Mink finally got a good look at Qibli's face. His eyes were still wide open and blood stained his lips. Thorn reached over and closed his eyes.

"There. Now he can rest," she said softly.

A sudden thought struck Mink. "Peacemaker!" She blurted, wiping a tear away. "What if whoever killed Qibli also killed him!?"

"It's possible," a SandWing said. "When he died, he went after a SandWing who I suspect stabbed Qibli. He didn't come back, but we never found his body anywhere. We followed him and found a different body. It was a young, female SandWing, about your age. We couldn't even identify what exactly happened, but it was brutal. Her chest was... burned open. Something burned through her chest, ribs, and mostly through her lungs. It didn't even look like fire had done it. We have no idea who it was. Do you know any IceWings who would have some sort of beef with Peacemaker?"

Mink thought hard. She was thought back to a couple months ago too. *Fennec*, she thought. *Fennec is the only SandWing I know who would ever do something like this.*

"Maybe Fennec?" Mink offered. Moon looked back at her, her face

completely soaked.

"Who cares where Peacemaker is? It's his fault for running off!" Mink felt a jab in her heart when she said that.

"Moon," Thorn said gently. "You're mourning and in grief. You're trying to find someplace to put it." She gently rubbed the back of her head as the NightWing buried her head in Thorn's chest again. Mink growled quietly and turned away. She looked around for Winter, but he wasn't in the crowd. She pushed out of the crowd until she spotted him talking to a SandWing. The SandWing was writing on a slate of paper.

"There's Kinkajou the RainWing and Turtle the SeaWing. His mother, Cobra, is down in the dungeon." His voice was shaking.

"Anyone else?"

Winter let out a short breath. "So many! That's what was amazing about Qibli! He was friends with everyone from every tribe because he was so friendly! He changed my life! He's probably changed so many other lives! If you can think of a dragon, Qibli was probably their friend! You could go around the entire kingdom and I bet you can't find a SandWing who wasn't friends with Qibli!" He cried. Tears started going down the IceWing's face, which surprised Mink. Moon always told her that he tries hiding his emotions.

"Alright, deep breaths. Do you know where I could find Turtle and Kinkajou?"

"Um... Turtle should be in the Sea Kingdom, and Kinkajou should be in the Rain Kingdom."

"Alright, I'll send out messages to them. If you can think of any specific names, let me know." The SandWing gently patted his shoulder and walked off. Winter turned to Mink and hugged her.

"Sorry you're seeing me like this," he said.

"Why? Your friend was killed. Why wouldn't you be sad?"

"I just didn't want you seeing me cry," Winter said, wiping a tear

away from both himself and Mink.

"Winter, I need to go find Peacemaker. I'm worried *sick* about him. I need to know if he's okay. I know you don't like that we're dating, but I love him. He's done nothing to hurt me. He's seriously the sweetest dragon I know. He just has so much going on."

"You don't need to explain. I understand. I can come with you if you want."

"But your arm-"

"My arm is fine. Just give me a minute." The crowd started dying off, so Winter ran to Moon, who was still in Thorn's embrace. "Hey," he said softly. Moon turned her head to look at him. "Mink and I are gonna go out looking for Peacemaker. I'll be back soon, okay?" Moon pulled back from Thorn and hugged Winter really tight. A blue blush formed on his face.

"Your highness?" A SandWing said.

"Yes, Six-Claws?" Thorn said.

"We need to move his body somewhere else. We can figure out what to do with Qibli later."

"Moon, we gotta go," Winter said.

"Please don't leave me," she sobbed. "I don't wanna lose you too."

"Winter, you don't have to come," Mink said. "You should probably stay here and take care of Moon."

"Thorn, can you please take care of Moon?" Winter asked.

"Of course I will."

Moon sighed. She looked him in the eyes and Winter wiped one of her tears away. "I'll be back," he said softly. He tried to pull away, but Moon pulled his head down and lightly kissed his cheek. The blush that formed on Winter's face was adorable, as much as how surprised he looked. She let him pull away, and he was left with a

very blue face. "C- come on, Mink," he stuttered. He ran out of the stronghold but Mink stopped him before he could take off.

"What was that all about?" Mink asked.

"Moon, Qibli and I were technically a throuple. They were worried that I might do something to myself because I was so alone for a long time. But I was worried about getting in the way of their relationship, even though they insisted. I love them both, but I couldn't bring myself to do it. Qibli said to Moon, 'fine, but when I die, you better drown him with love and attention. I'm gonna hold you to that.' Moon obviously agreed. I just didn't really expect her to actually go through with it. Especially so soon. So, that's what I think it was. I could totally be reading it wrong, but that's what I think."

"Very specific," Mink mumbled.

"Whatever. Let's just go and find Peacemaker." Winter took off abruptly, and Mink followed.

"Are you gonna be okay?" Mink asked.

"Um... I don't know. Hey, can we focus on Peacemaker? I don't really wanna think about this right now."

"Right. Sorry." So they flew off in the direction Peacemaker flew, hoping to find some sort of trace of him in Possibility, or on the way there.

Afraid of Getting a Little Wet?

Cliff let out a long sigh, looking out a red-tinted window. It started pouring rain about an hour ago. The sky was completely covered in rain clouds. He looked down at the market. There were only a few dragons down there, mostly under cover from the rain. He heard the door open behind him.

"Sweetheart, you've been in your room for hours. Is it really *that* boring without Auklet here?" Ruby said, coming in.

"It's not that. Do you remember Bumblebee?" Ruby nodded. "She's just been acting really strange lately. She's been... really down. Peacemaker knows something about it, and he's not saying anything. Anytime one of us asks him, he gets all nervous. I've tried privately talking to Bumblebee before I came here, but she blew me off. I'm really worried about her. And I'm pretty sure Gale knows what's going on too."

"Oh, is she friends with Gale?"

"A bit more than friends, I believe."

"Aw, that's sweet. Poor Gale could really use someone like Bumblebee to lighten up her life a bit more. She's been going through a lot lately."

"Yeah? She said she left the academy early because of family problems. Have you seen her lately?"

"Yeah. I let her stay here when she's not with her family." Cliff sighed and looked back out the window. Although they were blurry, he could see two green blurs and a blue blur in the distance, flying to the palace.

"Auklet?" He muttered. He hopped away from the window and ran past his mother. He ran down a couple halls until he got to the entrance, where two guards were posted inside instead of outside so

they didn't have to endure the rain. "Open the gate!" Cliff demanded. One guard pulled out a key and unlocked the door. Cliff pushed it open right as Auklet, Turtle, and... Trench landed. Auklet ran into his wings, breathing heavily. Her scales were completely soaked, so he pulled her inside and the others followed. "What's Trench doing here?"

"Good to see you too," he panted, shaking himself, sending water droplets flying everywhere. Turtle did the same.

"I hate the rain," Turtle grumbled. "Cliff, where's your mother?"

"Near my room." Turtle took off immediately. "What's this about?"

"Cliff, Coral is planning on attacking the Sky Kingdom *tonight*!" Auklet said, tearing up a bit. "Last night was... a lot. I just can't believe she's capable of doing something like this."

"I uh... sense that you two need some time alone. I'm gonna go find Turtle," Trench said, walking off.

"Are you sure she'll attack? Maybe since you're here, she won't do it?" Cliff offered.

"I don't know. That might not matter to her. I just hope your mother can figure out a plan when Turtle tells her. I don't want any of you to get killed." She buried her head in the crook of Cliff's neck. He could feel himself blushing profusely and thanked the moons that Trench wasn't there to point it out.

"I don't think I've ever seen you cry before," Cliff said gently. "Look, let's just relax for right now, okay? My mother will come up with something. I'm sure everything will be fine."

"No!" She shouted. "Don't tell me everything will me fine! You have no idea how things will turn out!"

"Well, I'm not sure if she'll actually go through with it. She'd turn the entire continent against her and I don't think anyone would accept her as Queen anymore. She must realize that."

"She's well beyond reason at this point."

Ruby suddenly tapped Cliff on the shoulder, making him jolt slightly. "Sweetheart, I assume you know what's going on?" Cliff nodded. He noticed Peril was standing beside her with Turtle. "I'm gonna have a little chat with Coral. There are two outcomes that could come out of this. Either I can talk her out of it, or she kills me and turns the whole continent against her. That's a win-win as far as I'm concerned."

"What!? I don't wanna lose you!" Cliff panicked, unwrapping his wings from Auklet. Ruby kissed his forehead.

"If it makes you feel better, I won't go down without a fight. If she wants to fight me, she'll get what she wants. I'm hoping it won't come to that, though. She used to be a good friend." She hugged him quickly. "I gotta go." She took off in the rain with Peril, leaving the group alone. Auklet finally shook herself dry and Cliff had to do the same.

"Peril will make sure nothing happens to her," Turtle reassured him. Cliff looked off in the distance, watching Ruby and Peril shrink away. But coming in the opposite direction was a yellow shape, which Cliff immediately saw that it was a SandWing. As he got closer, Cliff heard him panting loudly.

"Holy shit, *please* tell me Prince Turtle is here!" He panted, landing in the palace. The guards tried pushing him out, but Cliff stopped them.

"Yes, I'm here," Turtle said.

"Good! I flew all the way to the Sea Kingdom looking for you, but then one of your sisters said you were here! I have a letter for you."

"From who?" Turtle asked.

"Not really *from* anyone. Your friend Winter just listed off friends and you were one of them. I'm uh... I'm sorry about this." He handed the SeaWing a letter, sighed, and took off again. Turtle opened the letter and read it. He suddenly looked a bit paler than he did before.

"I'm sorry guys. I gotta go," he choked out. He dropped the letter and immediately took off into the rain. Auklet picked up the letter, read it, and let out a gasp. She handed Cliff the letter, so he read it.

Turtle,

I'm sorry to say, but your friend Qibli was murdered in Possibility by another SandWing while searching for the hybrid named Peacemaker. We have yet to identify who the killer was, but we're working on it. A SandWing body was found, which we suspect to be the killer, but the body was completely burned. No amount of fire or RainWing venom could have done something like that. Princess Mink of the IceWings suspects that Peacemaker may have something to do with the SandWing's death, as he was seen heading the same direction as the SandWing. We're very sorry for your loss and we wish you the best.

-The SandWings

Cliff looked up at Auklet, who looked as if she was really trying not to cry. He threw the scrap of parchment to the ground. He held Auklet's chin up so he could look her in the eyes. He pulled her into a hug and she happily accepted it, resting her head on his shoulder.

"This is too much," she choked out. "So much is happening. I can't even begin to imagine what Peacemaker is going through." Cliff gently stroked the back of Auklet's neck. As sad as he was, he felt the need to comfort her as much as he could.

"Hey, have you guys seen Turtle!? I haven't seen him anywhere!" Trench said, approaching them. "Oh, bad time?"

"He's probably flying to the Sand Kingdom now," Cliff said.

"WHAT!? Why the hell is he going there!?"

"Read the note on the ground," Cliff said, nodding to the paper on the ground. Trench picked it up and read it.

"Oh. That... makes sense. Peacemaker was the student everyone was talking about, right?" Cliff nodded. "Guess he was bad news after all."

"Don't talk shit about him," Cliff and Auklet said at the same time, making Trench flinch.

"Sorry. Geez. I'm just saying that Crayfish may have had a point."

Cliff growled under his breath. "Auklet, why is he here exactly?"

Auklet sighed. "He's my 'fiancé.' Coral arranged our marriage *without* telling me. We both agreed that we were not gonna get married because he already has a boyfriend and I didn't want to. He insisted that he'd come with."

"Also I could never marry her, even if I wasn't already taken. She's your girl," Trench said. Cliff's already red face turned an even brighter shade of red.

"Wha- I uh- I don't-" he stuttered.

"Cliff, I've known for a while," Auklet said. Cliff turned an even brighter red. He almost felt like crying at this point.

"Haha what? I don't even know what you're talking about!"

"Well, since this might be the last day we have left together..." Auklet pulled Cliff's head towards her own and their snouts met. Cliff's eyes widened, but he didn't pull away. His face was absolutely burning hot currently.

Holy shit holy shit holy shit! She's kissing me!

He wanted to melt into it, but he felt really awkward, especially with Trench standing there. He looked at the other SeaWing and he mouthed "you're welcome" and winked before walking off, probably to find something to do. Now that he was gone, he didn't feel incredibly awkward anymore, so he closed his eyes, enjoying the moment while it lasted.

After another minute, Auklet pulled away, catching her breath. "Wow," Cliff said. "I uh... I don't know what to say."

"Then don't say anything," she said, putting her head back on his shoulder and twining her tail around his. "Because I love you too."

"A- are you sure? I mean, there are so many others you could choose from."

"Cliff, I've never been more sure about anything in my life." Cliff's heart fluttered when she said this. They stood like that for a solid minute silently.

"Do you really think this might be our last day together?" Cliff asked.

"Who knows? Either my mother will separate us permanently, or we'll die."

"Is there any way for us to stay together without... killing your mother?"

"Depends how reasonable she decides to be." She thought for a second. "Hey, let's not think about this. If this is truly gonna be our last day together, then we shouldn't spend it by being such downers. Let's spend some time together. Just you and me."

Holy shit, I'm definitely dreaming. "A- alright. What did you have in mind?" Cliff asked. Auklet pulled her head back and kissed his snout.

"I don't know. We can make it up as we go. Let's just go and enjoy ourselves."

"In the... rain?"

"Afraid of getting a little wet?" Cliff smiled and kissed her and she happily kissed back.

"Fair enough," he said, squeezing her talon in his. They were about to leave the palace, when the doors slammed open, Queen Ruby barging in with Peril.

"They're already on their way here!" Peril said.

"Cliff, Auklet, get to the safety bunker below the palace. Cliff, you know the way," Ruby said. She looked calm but her tone and voice said otherwise. "Where's Turtle?"

"He had to leave. Something... happened," Auklet explained.

"Alright. Peril, go find Trench and lead him to the bunker. You two!" She shouted at the guards posted at the gates. "Get as many SkyWings to safety as possible! If we're lucky, we can-"

She was cut off as a little, green ball covered with pricks crashed through the window and landed in the middle of all of them. They all immediately knew what it was. Cliff instinctually shielded Auklet with his whole body. The cactus bounced and rolled directly into Peril. It let out a deafening explosion, throwing them all in different directions. Cliff felt an intense, sharp pain go through his entire body, and as soon as he impacted with the ground, everything went black.

Your problems are your own and I don't want anything to do with them

Bumblebee stood on the beach, looking at the horizon. She would get to see her parents again! What's there to worry about?

Turns out... a lot. She missed Gale a lot, poor Auklet had to deal with her mother, Peacemaker left to go talk with BlackIce a couple of days ago, endangering himself, and Mink also has to deal with all that stress. For all Bumblebee knew, Peacemaker was dead, and that thought is what's keeping her from leaving Pyrrhia.

Maybe I should go look for him. But at the same time, marching into BlackIce's hideout without any weapons is a terrible idea.

She rubbed her face, resisting the urge to cry. She needed to know if Peacemaker was alright. She grabbed a talonful of sand and threw it into the ocean.

I'll go home eventually, she thought, taking off in the opposite direction as Pantala. She wasn't going home until she knew Peacemaker was okay. *Alright, I just have to hope that BlackIce doesn't kill me.*

His hideout was on the other side of the Sand Kingdom, so it may take about an hour. On her way, her thoughts kept shifting between Gale and Peacemaker. She loved Gale, but lately, the feelings she's had for Gale have been transferring to Peacemaker, and she didn't know why. He's so sweet, he has an adorable smile, he was super handsome-

STOP IT BRAIN! He's dating Mink! Why am I like this!?

Well, maybe she did know why. She just didn't want to believe it.

She flew over Possibility and decided to land so she could stop for a couple of minutes. She noticed a piece of parchment nailed to the wall of a building. There was a fairly decent drawing of what looked like Peacemaker on it and it read "*WANTED for questioning*."

What the hell!?

She pulled it off the wall and a SandWing approached her. "You gonna go looking for him?"

"No. Why is this here? What did he do?"

"He killed a SandWing that had murdered another SandWing who we believe he was close with," he said.

"Then... isn't it a good thing he did that?"

"Well, the SandWing should've been taken into custody. Not killed. So the hybrid needs to be taken into custody, and possibly imprisoned."

"No! I know him! He wouldn't ever kill someone unless he has a reason! Hell, even if he has a reason, I don't believe he would ever really do it!" The SandWing sighed.

"I don't know what to tell you. It certainly happened, and you can choose to believe it or not all you want. But this is what happened and your beliefs aren't going to change that." He walked off, leaving Bumblebee alone with the poster.

I can't believe this. No matter how hard I try, I cannot believe Peacemaker actually murdered someone. I guess that means he's alive though.

She took off again, dropping the parchment. She still had to talk to BlackIce. It wasn't much longer after when she landed in front of his "hideout." She took a deep breath before walking in. She eventually got stopped by a RainWing.

"Huntsman, welcome ba-" he cut himself off. "What the hell? What are you doing here?"

"Hi, sorry. I just... need to talk with BlackIce," Bumblebee said.

"Well, he doesn't need to talk to you, so beat it!"

"Wait, please! It's about Peacemaker! I know he was here. Just *please* let me talk to him." The RainWing grumbled under his breath.

"Wait here," he growled. He walked further into the cave and she heard yelling, and then what sounded like arguing. Eventually, a black figure with some specks of white appeared. BlackIce, the dragon who tried to kill Peacemaker, killed his mother, and knocked him out was standing right in front of her, looking frustrated, and it was the most intimidating thing ever.

"What do you want?" He asked.

I'm going to die.

"U- um... I- I just wanted to know where Peacemaker is."

BlackIce raised a brow at her. "Why would I know?"

"Well... he came to talk to you a few days ago."

"Mhm. And then his friends came to 'rescue' him even when he didn't want to," he explained.

What?

"He didn't want to be rescued?"

"No. They acted like I was trying to kill him. All we really did was talk about... well, it doesn't matter. He was probably dragged back to Thorn's Stronghold. He's not here."

"I don't actually think he's there," Bumblebee said. "I saw a wanted poster of him in Possibility. Apparently, he killed someone. I feel like you had something to do with that."

"Excuse me?"

I'm definitely going to die.

"I- it's just that I feel like he wouldn't kill anyone unless you were involved."

"BLACKICE!" A familiar voice yelled behind her. Two IceWings appeared out of the darkness behind Bumblebee.

"Mink!? Winter!?" Bumblebee said excitedly.

"Bumblebee!? I thought you were going back home!" Mink said. They wrapped their wings around each other.

"BlackIce, you son of a bitch. I *strongly* believe it was *you* who killed him!" Winter growled, pinning the hybrid against the cave wall.

"Wait! Winter, it was a SandWing, remember?" Mink said.

Winter stopped for a second before growling again. "Where's Rattlesnake?"

"They said Peacemaker killed Qibli's killer," Mink said. Bumblebee pulled away from Mink.

"What?"

"Bumblebee, Qibli was murdered. After they got Peacemaker back from here, they went back to Thorn's Stronghold. Peacemaker and Qibli had an argument which resulted in Peacemaker leaving and going to Possibility. When he left... that was the first time I had ever seen Qibli cry. It was really sobbing. It was more of a guilty cry. Anyway, he went looking for him, and he got stabbed by a SandWing. I guess Peacemaker chased the killer and killed them. And now we don't know where he is."

"That's... a lot to take in," Bumblebee said, folding her wings in and looking down at her talons.

"And *this* piece of *shit* is gonna help us find him!" Winter growled.

"Hey, Ice Cube Tray! I don't gotta do *shit* for you! Your problems are your own and I don't want anything to do with them," BlackIce said,

shoving Winter. "If I wanted to kill Qibli, I could've done it easily when you guys came to get Peacemaker. Speaking of which, good luck looking for him."

"Can we at least search your hideout for him?" Mink asked.

"Absolutely not."

"Well, if he's not here, then there's no reason for you to say 'no,'" Winter said.

"No. My reason is 'because I said so.' Should be good enough for you," BlackIce growled.

"*Please* let us check!" Bumblebee pleaded.

"*NO*! He's not here! For fuck's sake, am I always gonna be the first dragon you go to when that brat goes missing?"

"Yes," Winter said.

BlackIce sighed and put on his "trying-to-look-calm" face. "Alright, look. He isn't here. And I'm sorry he's missing. But whatever's going on is between you guys. I have no idea where he could have gone. Frankly, I'm surprised Mink doesn't know where he is. Don't you spend like... five hundred percent of your time together?"

"No! At least... not *that* much time," Mink said.

"Keep telling yourself that. Anyways, I hope you find him. Good luck." BlackIce walked off.

"Well, come on, you two," Winter sighed. It took a second for Bumblebee's eyes to adjust to the brightness of the sun. Mink growled and chucked a talonful of sand into the cave.

"That piece of shit," she growled.

"Mink, let's go back to the Stronghold. We've searched the entire kingdom. It could take weeks, maybe even *months* to find him if he left the kingdom," Winter said.

"But-"

"He's right," Bumblebee said. "It pains me to say it, but if you've searched the entire kingdom with no sign of him, you might be screwed. For right now, at least."

"Don't tell me you're giving up too!"

"Mink I-"

"Bumblebee, he's our friend! More than that, he's family! And you're giving up on him!? He *needs* us! Now more than ever! We're all he has left!"

"Mink, we're not giving up on him," Winter said. "We'll keep searching for him. For now, we should take a break. That's all. We'll find him. I promise. You coming Bumblebee?"

"You go on. I'll catch up. There's something I gotta do." Winter nodded. He took off, but looked back when Mink didn't follow. She looked down at the ground for a couple seconds before she took off too.

Bumblebee waited until they were far enough away before she ran back into the cave. Luckily, no one was guarding it yet. She peeked into the large part of the cave where the hideout was.

Peacemaker!

There he is! Sitting on a sofa, head down and wings wrapped around himself. One of his wings looked stitched up, and he had a bandage around his head that was stained a bit with blood.

What surprised her the most was that the HiveWing of the group was sitting beside him, her two right wings wrapped around him.

"It's impolite to stare," a voice said behind her. She yelped loudly when she saw BlackIce. Peacemaker's head shot up when BlackIce ushered Bumblebee over to him. "Alright, Peacemaker. She found out. This is your problem now."

"Uh... hi Huntsman. The RainWing over there said you were gone,"

Bumblebee said awkwardly.

"Yeah. Snakeroot is an idiot."

"Fuck you!" The RainWing shouted.

Peacemaker sighed. He stood up and put a wing around Bumblebee and led her to an empty, unused cave. He looked her in the eyes for a second before breaking down. He buried his head in her chest.

"He's gone! Bumblebee, he's gone!" He cried.

"I know, I heard. I'm so sorry," Bumblebee said, putting her four wings around him. "Let's go see Mink. She'd be-"

"*No*!" He exclaimed, pulling away. "I don't want her to know I'm here. It's bad enough that *you* know. I don't want anyone to get dragged into this!"

"Peacemaker, she's so worried about you. They all probably are. *I* am and I at least know you're alive. Can't I at least tell them where you are and that you're okay?"

"No! If you tell Mink, she'll come here and then refuse to leave until I leave."

"Is that bad?"

"Yes! If Firn finds me, he'll definitely kill her! Bumblebee, *please! I can't lose her too! I can't lose any of you!*" He was starting to cry again. She didn't know if it was genuine or to make her feel bad, but if it's the latter, it's working, and she didn't know how to feel about that. "I kept your secret from everyone. Please?" He asked again, gently placing his front talons on either side of her head.

"I- I don't know! I don't want Mink to keep worrying! And also I don't trust BlackIce! Do you forget he murdered your mother!? What makes you think you can trust him!?"

Peacemaker growled under his breath at her and pulled his talons away from her. "I never forgot. And I *don't* trust him. And do *not* bring that up again! I don't need to be reminded of it every single

damn second of the day! You think I don't think about that all the fucking time!? So keep your goddamn mouth shut about it!" Bumblebee flinched.

"Sorry. I'm just worried about you."

"Well, I don't need you to worry about me, alright!?" He barked at her.

Where'd this sudden mood change come from? Maybe it's just one of his bursts?

"Peacemaker... Did you kill a SandWing?"

"Yes. I killed that piece of shit Fennec. And she *fucking deserved it."*

He really did do it. Wait. What if...

"Who am I talking to?" Bumblebee asked.

"What do you mean?"

Bumblebee sighed. "Peacemaker, if this is you, please forgive me." Bumblebee punched him hard enough in the face that it sent him to the ground. He looked around dazed. Bumblebee shooked her talon.

"Ow," he said rubbing his snout. "Peacemaker is cursing you out right now."

Oh shit.

"Darkstalker?"

"Look," he said, standing up. "Peacemaker's mind isn't right. He hasn't been himself since Qibli died. In fact, he's calling you a 'bitch' and a 'piece of shit.' I think you should leave. I'll ask BlackIce to smack us over the head so Peacemaker doesn't yell at you. By the way, having that happen to us over and over again is really not good for us. We have constant headaches now."

"Darkstalker, I'm sorry about-"

"Nah, don't worry about it," he said.

Whoa. He's being a lot more forgiving than normal.

"So... can I tell Mink?"

Darkstalker scratched his head and sighed. "I'm gonna leave that up to you. But maybe don't let her come here. It might really screw him up. Alright, now he's telling me to tell you to leave."

Bumblebee sighed, wiping tears from her eyes. "Please take care of Peacemaker," she said. He followed her out, but as they left that cave, BlackIce was standing outside.

"Hello Darkstalker," he said.

"Hey, if you're gonna smack me over the head, at least wait for Bumblebee to leave," Darkstalker said, backing up slightly.

"Yeah, I know. I heard everything." He looked at Bumblebee. "I'm not gonna hurt him. I can assure you, I'm keeping him here to keep him safe. Firn can come back at any moment, and I'm going to make sure he can't get to him."

"I'm gonna tell Mink that he's here," Bumblebee said. Darkstalker suddenly winced.

"Peacemaker yelled 'no' really loudly," he said.

"Go on, get outta here," BlackIce said, gently pushing Bumblebee towards the exit. She rushed out and she immediately heard Peacemaker yelling.

"BUMBLEBEE! DON'T YOU FUCKING DARE TELL MINK!" Bumblebee ran a bit faster and took off as soon as the desert sun hit her.

She didn't stop until she got to Thorn's Stronghold, where she was met by Mink. "Where were you!?"

"Mink... there's something I gotta tell you."

If it felt like the ending was rushed... it was

Still Time For Chaos to Ensue

Auklet was thrown into the nearest wall. She felt her ribs snap and all the air was knocked out of her lungs. Her chest looked a bit purple. She tried to breathe but all she inhaled was smoke, making her cough. It hurt more than any other cough ever had. Her ears were ringing and she couldn't hear anything else. She opened her eyes, but she could hardly see. She was too dazed. She grasped her chest and felt a few pricks sticking out. She ripped them out one by one before she was struck with a realization.

Cliff!

She rubbed her eyes, trying to get her vision back. She tried to stand, but she immediately fell back over as she felt a horrible pain in her left back leg. She looked back. There were no pricks sticking out, so all she could assume was that her leg was broken.

She crawled over to Cliff, who was lying on the ground. His back was completely burnt and covered in pricks. Half of his face had blisters and one of his horns was half gone.

Auklet pressed two of her claws to his neck to check for a pulse. She sighed in relief when she could feel the pulse. She looked over at Queen Ruby, who was trying to stand up, and Peril, who was already standing, but clutching her chest. Ruby shouted something, but all Auklet could hear was constant ringing. She began pulling the pricks out of Cliff's back until Ruby tapped on her shoulder. She shouted something at her but she still couldn't hear her. Auklet pointed at her ear and shook her head. Ruby made a "follow me" gesture. Auklet tried standing again, but immediately fell over, a sharp pain taking over her leg.

Ruby shouted something at the two guards, who were dizzily standing up. Auklet saw Trench rushing in, who immediately went to Auklet's side, holding her up. She could feel a bunch of vibrations in the ground, so she could assume there were other explosions going off around the kingdom.

Ruby gently picked up Cliff and gestured for Auklet and Trench to follow her again. As they followed, Auklet's hearing was slowly coming back. At the same time, the vibrations felt more and more intense over time. Ruby opened a door and they entered a fairly big room with metal walls. There were a couple beds and medical kits hanging on the walls. Ruby placed Cliff in a bed.

"You three stay here!" Ruby's muffled voice said. She immediately left the room, and closed the door. Auklet sat on another bed, facing Cliff. She clutched her chest which was slightly more purple and bruised than before.

"You alright?" Trench asked.

"No," Auklet answered. "My mother is attacking another tribe. Nothing about this is alright."

"Yeah, I'll say. Cliff isn't looking too well." There was a loud explosion outside, scaring them both. "Look on the bright side. When other tribes get word of what's happening, they'll send help."

Auklet held one of Cliff's talons in her own. "He saved me." Trench went to Cliff's back side and started picking the remaining pricks out until there was a sudden knock on the metal door.

"Don't answer that," Auklet whispered. Another knock.

"AUKLET!?" A voice shouted.

"Tsunami!? Answer it!" Trench raised a brow at her before hesitantly opening the door. Two SeaWings burst in.

"Auklet!" Anemone yelled happily. She wrapped her wings around Auklet, pulling her close and hard. Her chest was pushed hard into Anemone's chest, and that was one of the most painful experiences of her life.

"OW OW OW OW!" She pulled back and clutched her chest. Seeing her reaction, Tsunami gently pulled her into a hug. Instinctually, she tried to stand, but fell over again.

"Son of a bitch," Tsunami growled, helping her up. "I can't believe

Mother is doing this. And Ruby told us to stay here, which is bullshit. It's OUR MOTHER!"

"Happy to see you too," Trench grumbled.

"She probably doesn't want us to fight our own mother," Anemone said.

"TOTAL BULLSHIT! I'LL FIGHT HER ALL I WANT!" Tsunami shouted. Auklet gently rubbed Cliff's head.

"Really? In front of your 'fiancé'" Anemone said.

"I have a boyfriend!" Trench defended.

Auklet sighed and laid down in the bed. She was in too much pain. She looked up at the ceiling and sighed. She clutched her chest, but immediately regretted it as a sharp pain hit her and she immediately sat up. Tsunami sat beside her and put a wing around her. Auklet leaned into her, watching Anemone pace back and forth and Trench pulling pricks out of Cliff's back.

"Fuck. How many pricks could come out of *one* cactus?" Trench complained.

"Hold on. Where the hell is Turtle!?" Anemone suddenly said.

"Oh. He left for the Sand Kingdom. Um... Qibli was killed," Auklet explained. Anemone stopped and stared and Tsunami unwrapped her wing around her.

"You're kidding, right?" Tsunami asked.

"Nope, she's not," Trench said. He handed her the note that was for Turtle. She read through it and handed it to Anemone.

"Whoa. That's-" Tsunami was cut off when the door was blown open.

"THEY'RE HOLDING THE PRINCESSES HOSTAGE!" A SeaWing shouted.

"No no no! They're not-" Anemone tried to talk them out of it as they were all grabbed.

"Get your dirty talons off of me!" Tsunami objected, trying to shove them. One SeaWing roughly grabbed Auklet's broken leg and she roared in pain, but the SeaWing didn't seem to care. Another SeaWing grabbed Auklet and they both picked her up. She kicked away and fell right on her chest. She almost passed out from the pain itself. Anemone didn't fight back. She just sighed and accepted it.

They picked Auklet back up and the SeaWings who weren't holding any of them looked at Cliff. "What should we do with him?" A SeaWing asked.

"I don't know. Kill him?"

"DON'T TOUCH HIM!" Auklet shouted.

"Calm down, Your Highness. That can be Queen Coral's job. I know who this is. It's Queen Ruby's son." The SeaWing grabbed Cliff and dragged him off the bed. "Come on. Queen Coral is waiting upstairs."

Waiting? For what?

They got "escorted" up the stairs, and Cliff was being dragged behind. They reached the top of the stairs and Auklet had just noticed that the explosions had stopped. Maybe it was a retreat?

It most definitely was *not* a retreat. About one hundred SkyWings were lined up, on their knees, Queen Ruby being forced to watch as she was being held down by numerous SeaWings, and a crowd of SkyWings also being forced to watch. Queen Coral stood in front of the line of SkyWings. Some of them were trembling, crying, and saying last goodbyes to their loved ones.

"Your Majesty! We found your daughters! But your son wasn't here!" A SeaWing that was holding Anemone shouted. They were put in front of Coral. They gently set Auklet down while they threw Cliff in front of Ruby, which resulted in numerous gasps. When she sat

up, she was immediately slapped by her mother.

"You *warned them!*" She shouted.

"Well, I didn't want you to eliminate an entire tribe! Mother or not, I won't let anyone do that!" Another slap.

"You betrayed your tribe!"

"YOU BROKE THE TREATY!" Coral slapped Auklet again, but this time, Tsunami bit her talon hard enough to draw blood.

"Let all these SkyWings go!" Tsunami growled.

"You're in no position to give me orders," Coral growled back, shaking her bleeding talon. "And you just attacked your queen! If you weren't my daughter, I'd have you locked away!" That didn't seem to bother Tsunami, as she snapped at Coral again.

"Let them go! They're innocent!" Anemone shouted. Coral growled again, and approached Ruby. She looked down at Cliff.

"So. This is the SkyWing you were talking about, Auklet?" She didn't respond.

"LEAVE HIM ALONE!" Ruby shouted. Coral slashed her face, drawing a significant amount of blood.

"In love with a SkyWing. I'll never have any more heirs. Anemone loves that RainWing girl, and I'd never let any offspring of Tsunami's sea slug be queen." That did it for Tsunami. She tackled her mother to the ground and slashed at a jugular vein. Almost immediately, Coral began sputtering and coughing. Blood spewed out over Tsunami's chest. All the SeaWings, and even some SkyWings gasped and panicked. They let Ruby go, and she pulled Tsunami away.

Holy shit! Oh my god, mother's dead! H- how could Tsunami do this!? No, she deserved it. Didn't she? But she was our MOTHER!

It was such a quick end for Coral. Auklet, Anemone, and Trench stared in shock. Tsunami stared at her blood stained talons, the

weight of what she just did falling on her. She looked at her sisters and Trench. "Guys, I... I'm sorry! I'm really sorry! I- I didn't mean for that to happen! I just snapped! Oh my god, I killed Father *and* Mother," she muttered that last part.

Auklet just realized she was trembling slightly. She suddenly felt a wing wrap around her. Anemone pulled her in slightly, which Auklet accepted, leaning against her older sister.

"Your orders, Your Majesty?" A SeaWing bowed to Tsunami.

"What?"

"You're an heir, and you killed your mother. You're now the queen, Your Majesty."

She looked at Auklet and Anemone, and Auklet noticed that Tsunami was trembling slightly more than her. "Um... first order is to free the SkyWings," she shouted, but her voice was trembling. None of the SeaWings moved.

"You heard the queen!" Anemone shouted. All the SeaWings eventually backed away, which resulted in numerous SkyWings lunging at them.

"HEY!" Ruby shouted, stopping them immediately.

"They attacked us!"

"Under Coral's rule! They're now under Queen Tsunami's rule!" Auklet yelped when she felt talons on her broken leg.

"S- sorry!" A nervous-looking SkyWing said, holding a roll of stockinette and padding. "I'm just trying to put a cast on it. I should've said something first." Auklet sighed and laid down on her side to make it easier for the her. She stared at the other SkyWings running over to each other, hugging and crying. She occasionally tensed up when she felt a jolt of pain.

"Are you alright?" Ruby asked Tsunami softly. She shook her head.

"Killing isn't what's bothering me. It's *who* I killed. I killed *our*

mother! I know it saved countless SkyWings, but I feel like killing her wasn't the right thing to do. We started a school for *peace*, and I just killed a *queen*!"

When the SkyWing finished on her leg, Auklet tried standing. She was able to stand a bit, but she was limping hard. "I don't think you should stand for the rest of the day," the SkyWing said. "Give yourself time to heal."

She ignored her, limping over to Cliff, who was being picked up by two SkyWings. Most of the SeaWings were trying to apologize to the SkyWings, but most of them wouldn't have it, ignoring them or snapping at them.

"AUKLET!" A voice shouted behind her. She looked back and saw a familiar SkyWing running towards her.

"Gale!?"

"Holy shit! You would NOT believe the day I've had!" She was bleeding quite a bit. Her bottom lip was split open, and there were a few gashes around her body. "I was arguing with my piece of shit mother, and suddenly a HUGE explosion hit my house, killing her! I don't know if I should be relieved or sad, but either way, I'm glad you're okay! Where's Cliff?"

"Being carried to where I'm assuming is the hospital wing," Auklet said, hugging the SkyWing. "Speaking of which, you should go there. You're bleeding like crazy!"

"You're one to talk! Your chest is purple!" Auklet looked down at her chest. It was badly bruised, a dark purple.

"I'm fine."

"Well... I wouldn't say 'fine.'" The SkyWing from earlier said. "They heal on their own in about six weeks. The best you can do is restrict your activity. Rest is good for you. For your chest *and* your leg."

"Excuse me, Sunrise," Ruby said behind her. "Auklet, do you think you can help me with something?"

"Of course."

"Sunrise, go clean Gale up."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"Bye," Gale said, walking off with Sunrise.

"So, I was wondering if you'd be okay going out into the market and looking for survivors? Pretty much all of the guards are badly injured or dead."

"Oh. Yeah, sure." Ruby gently rubbed her shoulder before walking past her. Auklet walked past a bunch of SkyWings. She kept getting skeptic looks, which made sense to her. She couldn't imagine they'd be able to trust any SeaWing for a long time.

When she stepped outside, she got half a second of fresh air before more smoke filled her lungs. She let out a painful cough, clutching her chest. She looked around the market. There were fires and bodies everywhere, some SeaWings, but mostly SkyWings. "Hey, you doing okay?" A voice asked behind her, making her jump. She looked behind her and saw Trench sidling up beside her.

"No. There are absolutely no reasons to be okay. My mother is dead, Cliff is unconscious, and I'm scared he won't ever wake up, and so many innocent SkyWings were murdered. The only good thing to come out of all of this is that I know Tsunami will be a good queen," she said.

"Hey, look!" Trench said, pointing west of them. Numerous brown dragons were flying in their direction. Auklet could faintly make out Queen Moorhen and... one of them looked like Clay. When they landed, all the MudWings went inside immediately except for Clay.

"Hey, Auklet, Trench. Are you doing okay?"

"We just went over this. No, I'm not." Clay sighed.

"Is Tsunami here?"

"Yeah, inside. She's not doing much better."

"Alright. Be careful. A lot of SkyWings probably lost family, and aren't gonna be too happy about any SeaWings being here," the MudWing said before going inside.

"Anyways," Auklet said. "Queen Ruby sent me out here to look for any survivors. I gotta go."

"Yeah, she asked me to do that too."

"Oh. Okay." Auklet stepped into the market, stepping over bodies and debris. "Hey, you look around here. I'm gonna go look around the houses."

She limped over to where the houses are. About half of them were decimated. She saw a red talon sticking out of rubble.

Well, I hope they're alive.

She pulled the arm up, but only the arm came up. She yelped and dropped it. She repressed the urge to vomit. She suspected the rest of the body was under the debris, but she was too scared to see it. She looked around a bit more until she spotted a red, round object.

Oh no.

She ran over to it, and it was just as she expected. There was an egg lying on its side, but it was perfectly intact, however there was some blood on the egg. Next to the egg, there were two SkyWing bodies that were a lot more gruesome than just seeing an arm. One of them had their head completely blown off, and the other body was blown in half, intestines trailing out. If the arm almost made her vomit, seeing those bodies definitely did. She looked away and threw up and felt the worst pain she's felt in her chest so far. When she spat out the rest of it, she grabbed the egg quickly and looked away again. She checked the egg to see if there were any cracks at all, but there was nothing. Then she heard a *tap tap tap.*

Oh my god, it's still alive!

She held it close, hoping the dragonet could feel her warmth. Something about finding an egg all alone brought something out of her. She just felt the need to protect it.

"You're okay, little one," she whispered. "You're safe."

I should probably tell Ruby.

"Oh shit," Trench suddenly said, standing in front of her.

"Language. There's a child present."

"Uh-huh. Yeah."

"Anyways, I'm gonna bring the egg to Ruby." Trench nodded. As she walked off, she heard Trench shout, "WHAT THE FUCK!" Most likely because of the bodies.

When she reached the door, she went in and was met by a SkyWing. "Th- that's my egg! You're stealing my egg!"

"I- I had no idea! I just found it!"

"Well, give it back!" The SkyWing shouted. She reached for it, but Auklet instinctually pulled away.

"Why'd you leave it in your house if it's yours? And who were the two dead dragons next to it?"

"Her father and sister most likely. I ran away as soon as I heard an explosion."

"You *abandoned* your dragonet!?" Auklet growled.

"So what? She's alive, isn't she?"

"Yeah, no thanks to you!"

"What's going on here?" Ruby tapped on the SkyWing's shoulder.

"Your Highness! This SeaWing *stole* my egg!"

"No! You left her to die! You're a terrible mother and you don't deserve to have a dragonet!"

"Both of you, stop. Auklet, tell me what happened."

"I went out to look for survivors like you told me to. I didn't find any, but I found this egg in a destroyed house next to two bodies. This *bitch* claims it was her egg, but that means she left it to die, and I don't feel comfortable letting her have the egg."

"Fuck you! As soon as I heard an explosion, I flew off! It didn't even think about the egg!" Auklet and Ruby just stared at her.

"Was... that supposed to help your case? Because it definitely didn't. That's dragonet endangerment. If that's truly *your* dragonet, *you* are supposed to take full responsibility for her. Your dragonet always comes first. In fact, I could have you arres-"

They fell silent when they heard a crack.

Uh oh. Was I squeezing it too hard? Is it hatching?

Another crack. Auklet was nervous and excited at the same time, and this wasn't even her own dragonet. A small, orange-ish red talon broke through the shell. She felt around until it grabbed Auklet's claw. Another talon popped out, pulled back, and then a tiny snout popped out. She pushed a little harder until more of the shell broke and her whole head popped out.

"Hello little one," Auklet said, smiling. The red-orange head tilted to the side as she stared at Auklet. She pushed a bit harder until she pushed her entire body out and Auklet caught her. She was warm and slick from being in the egg which caught Auklet a bit off guard.

"Give me my baby, SeaWing!" The SkyWing reached for the dragonet, but Auklet pulled away and held the dragonet to her chest.

"No! You can't be trusted with dragonets! Ruby, tell her! I was forced to read about laws, and if the parents endanger the dragonet, they'll be relocated to more suitable parents!" Auklet said.

"That is, in fact, the law."

"Meebie!" The dragonet exclaimed.

"I know, she *is* a meanie," Auklet whispered to the dragonet. She

pressed her head against Auklet's chest, which melted her heart in a strange way.

"Sorry, Windshear. If you don't agree to it, I can have you arrested," Ruby said. Windshear growled.

"You say your dragonet comes first, and yet, yours is currently in the hospital."

"Hey, he saved me!"

"Biggest mistake he's ever made."

"And you've made about a hundred mistakes in the past three minutes," a guard said behind Windshear. "Come on, we're gonna go take a walk."

"What!? No! That's MY daughter!" The guard grabbed her arm. "Wait! C- could we see what happens when I hold her? I'm sure she'd immediately realize I'm her *real* mother if I held her."

"Well, sure. But you're not running off with her," the guard said.

"No, I won't. I'll at least promise that." Auklet hesitated, but eventually held out the dragonet. Windshear took her. The dragonet started whimpering and tried reaching for Auklet. "No, *I'm* your mother."

"She seems to disagree," Auklet said.

"Shut up." She held the dragonet close to her, and she tried pushing away. She began whimpering louder until it turned into a cry. "Calm down, brat. I'm actually a SkyWing. No SeaWing could ever take care of you."

"I think I've seen enough," Auklet said, grabbing the dragonet from her. She immediately snuggled up into Auklet's chest.

"NO! THAT IS *MY* DRAGONET!" The guard held Windshear back. He suddenly hit her over the head with the handle of a knife, knocking her out.

"We'll take care of her," Ruby sighed. "Auklet, we can find someone to take care of the dragonet."

"No!" Auklet said abruptly. "I can take care of her. I'll gladly do it."

"Are you sure? Dragonets aren't easy to take care of. Especially at your age. You're still young."

"I'm sure." She looked at the dragonet snuggled against her chest. "I'm gonna go see Cliff."

"Alright, sweetheart. Be warned, there are some nasty injuries in there." Auklet nodded, and walked further into the palace. It still smelled like smoke, and there were still SeaWings trying to apologize to SkyWings. Tsunami was also being talked to by a couple dozen SeaWings and MudWings all at once with Anemone, Clay, and Queen Moorhen standing beside her. She got a bunch of weird looks from SkyWings for holding a SkyWing dragonet.

When she entered the medical wing, she was taken aback about everything. There were body bags, horribly injured SkyWings, and even a few SeaWings. She spotted Cliff lying in a bed on his stomach. He looked a bit cleaned up, but he still looked awful. All the pricks were gone from his back, but the severe burns on his back somehow looked worse.

"Wrrrrrple?" The dragonet said.

"You sure said it." She crouched next to Cliff and gently rubbed his head. "Thank you," she whispered, kissing his forehead.

"Baba!" the dragonet exclaimed.

"Oh, sweetie, I gotta think of a name for you."

"Meeble bep!"

"Nah, that name sucks. How about... Tornado?"

"Bobabo."

"Right. Bobabo." Auklet sighed and sat beside Cliff's bed. She

yawned, only now realizing how exhausted she was. She flew all the way to the Sky Kingdom from the Sea Kingdom without stopping, had almost no time to rest because a cactus crashed through the window, she had to hide, and she had to watch her mother die.

Auklet rubbed her face. When she was younger, Coral was an amazing mother. She had no idea what happened to her. Or maybe nothing happened to her and she was just seeing it clearly for the first time. She felt herself begin to tear up a bit.

She was going to hurt Cliff.

She looked down at Tornado, who was shaking her head because a tear landed on her. "Sorry," she mumbled.

"You doing okay?" Someone asked behind her. She looked back and saw Tsunami coming to sit next to her.

"I'm so tired. I haven't slept in so long. How are you?"

"Stressed. Guilty. Queen Moorhen doesn't know if she trusts me to be the queen. Ruby does, but I can tell she doesn't one hundred percent trust all the SeaWings anymore. I guess Ruby also sent a SkyWing out to Glory, so she'll probably be here soon." Tsunami sighed. "How's your leg?"

"It's fine." It still stung a bit, but it wasn't bad. Or, at least, that's what Auklet was telling herself.

Tornado tried reaching over to Tsunami, which caught her attention. "Ah, Ruby told me about you," she said, taking Tornado. "We'll make sure you feel right at home in the Sea Kingdom."

"Actually..." Auklet started. Tsunami looked at her. "I don't think I want to go back to the Sea Kingdom. I just... feel much happier here. Ruby's a great queen. I'm in love with a SkyWing, and I'd rather stay with the dragon I love." She looked at Cliff again.

"Well... I can respect that. Just know that you'll always have a home in the Sea Kingdom, and you'll always be welcome there." Tsunami set Tornado down and pulled Auklet in for a hug. Tornado started

hugging Auklet's leg. "Promise you'll visit often."

Auklet laughed. "I don't know if I can promise 'often,' but I will visit occasionally."

"Deal." Auklet pulled away and picked up Tornado, who immediately snuggled into her chest. "You're a lot braver than me. Riptide asked if I wanted dragonets. When he asked, I realized just how scared I was of being a parent. I wasn't ready at all."

"I wasn't either. Just seeing her egg abandoned brought something out of me."

"Well, it seems you got lucky. She seems really calm, especially for a baby. She seems to just want to cuddle," Tsunami said.

"Well, she was just hatched. There's still time for chaos to ensue." Tsunami laughed.

"Well, come on. You should go say goodbye to Anemone. We need to get Mother's body to the Sea Kingdom and do whatever traditional things SeaWings do when a queen dies."

Auklet looked at Cliff one more time before walking off with Tsunami.

Uncalled for!

"Would you stop that?" BlackIce said. Peacemaker was pacing back and forth.

"No. I'm freaking out," he said. Jet stepped beside him.

"Hey, how about we do some breathing exercises? Breathe in." Jet started breathing deeply. Peacemaker elbowed him in the chest, knocking all his air out. "Aaaaaand out," the SkyWing rasped.

BlackIce sighed. "Look, I know you're upset, but-"

"Oh, 'upset' doesn't even *begin* to describe it!" Peacemaker growled.

"Sweetie, they just want to help you," Huntsman said.

"I don't want them to help me. I want them to be *safe*!" He sat down beside Rattlesnake, who scooted away.

Maybe I should run off before they get here.

Running off is how Qibli died.

Peacemaker smacked his own head out of instinct to shut Darkstalker up. He kind of regret it because of the constant headaches he gets now.

"Stop that," BlackIce said. "I thought I told you to lay off the head trauma."

"Darkstalker was being a bitch."

"Well, judging by how both of you have been acting lately, he was probably being more sensible than you," Coldsnap said. Peacemaker threw a small rock at him.

"Hey, I have an idea," BlackIce said. "Do you know what skyfire is?"

"Yeah?"

"Well, I happen to have a little bit of it. Maybe if you hold some, it'll block out Darkstalker."

"Yes! Give me some! I need a break from that annoying piece of shit!"

What the hell have I done to you?

Peacemaker ignored him as BlackIce ran into his cave. He came back out thirty seconds later, holding a small, black stone.

"Just give it back when you're done with it. It's the only way I can keep Moon out of my head," he said. He placed the stone in Peacemaker's talon and he collapsed almost immediately, an intense pain going through his head.

He must have blacked out for a bit because he opened his eyes and saw what looked like the panicked face of Mink staring down at him.

Alright, we are NEVER touching one of those stones again!

"Holy shit, we thought he killed you!" The IceWing said.

"How long was I out? I didn't even notice I passed out," Peacemaker asked, rubbing his head.

"Not too long. About ten minutes. But hey, now we know not to ever give you skyfire. But you were having a full-blown seizure," BlackIce said. Peacemaker sat up and saw who was there. Mink, Bumblebee, Moon, Winter, and Kinkajou.

"You should've seen BlackIce," Jet said. "He was freaking out because he thought you were dead."

"I was *not*!"

Peacemaker looked over at Moon. She did not look happy to be there. He then looked at Bumblebee, and he growled under his breath.

"I told you not to tell anyone," he growled.

"Well, you called me a bitch and a piece of shit," she said.

Peacemaker stood up. "Yeah, you punched me in the face, you attention-seeking bitch."

"'Attention-seeking'?"

"I'm almost a hundred percent certain your little 'depression' act is for attention."

"Depression? What are you-" Mink cut herself off. "Actually, that would explain a lot."

"I'm not 'acting,'" Bumblebee said, tears filling her eyes.

"She's not lying," Moon said.

"Y- you know?" The HiveWing asked.

"I *can* read minds, you know."

"Lying or not, she has *really* messed up *my* health. I've been struggling to keep it all a secret for a MONTH!" Peacemaker said, slowly approaching Bumblebee. "You need to suck it up and go find some kind of help, or you might as well just get it over with and kill yourself!"

"Whoa, hey!" BlackIce shouted.

"Hey, uncalled for!" Kinkajou said, turning a pale blue with red spots. She sidled up beside Bumblebee and pulled her into a hug.

"What the hell is wrong with you!?" Mink said. "I know you've been through a lot, but you have no right to take it all out on her!"

"It's her fault you're all here! I told her so many times to not tell you guys, but here you are! I have EVERY right to be pissed off at her!"

"She was worried about you! We all were!" Peacemaker looked at Kinkajou, who was quietly comforting Bumblebee.

"Well..." he looked at the HiveWing. "Here's a little payback." He shoved Kinkajou away from Bumblebee and punched her in the face harder than she did to him. She fell to the ground, clutching her nose, which was bleeding heavily. He would have done it again, but Mink and Moon grabbed him, while Kinkajou and Winter got to Bumblebee's side.

What the hell is wrong with you!? Where is all this aggression coming from!?

"What have you been putting inside his head, BlackIce!?" Moon said. "He's never been like this!"

"Hey, you're the mind reader here. You of all the dragons here should know that I didn't do shit!" The hybrid defended.

"HOLY SHIT, GET OFF HIS ASS!" Peacemaker shouted, breaking free. "He didn't do anything to me! Stop blaming him for *everything*!"

"Peacemaker, he-" Mink started.

"I KNOW WHAT HE DID! I KNOW HE KILLED MY MOTHER! How stupid do you think I am!? Of course I know what he did! I have been suffering from it every single day since then! And two months later, I lost the closest thing I've had to a father! And if BlackIce had killed me instead of my mother, Qibli would still be alive! Hell, if he didn't show up *at all*, he would still be alive! Mother would still be alive! I wouldn't have had to kill Fennec! So, yeah! I know he ruined my life! But none of it was his fault! Firn fucked with him!"

"I'm sorry," Bumblebee whimpered. "I'm sorry for putting so much stress on you. I just didn't want anyone to worry."

"No, you don't need to apologize," Mink said. "Peacemaker, you need to apologize to her."

The hybrid sighed. "You're right." He crouched down in front of the HiveWing. "Bumblebee. I'm sorry... you *think* you deserve an apology." Mink immediately smacked him on the back of the head. He could faintly hear BlackIce snicker. Huntsman elbowed him.

"Don't encourage that," she said.

"Sorry. That was just such a 'me' thing to say."

"Oh no, you're rubbing off on him," Coldsnap said. "I don't think I'm quite ready for the world to have two BlackIce's."

"Hey, if I ever turn out to be anything like BlackIce, I want someone to stab me," Peacemaker said, shoving Mink away from him. He sat down on the sofa, staring at a knife that was in a holster on BlackIce's wrist. The handle was golden and it was engraved with a wavy pattern. There was a red ruby at the end of the handle with green emeralds on the ends of the cross-guards.

That's the knife that killed Mother.

"Alright, I don't get it. Do you or do you *not* hate me?" BlackIce asked.

"Yes."

"Okay, that was maddeningly unhelpful."

Look, whatever idea your brain is about to concoct, it's gonna be a bad idea. Not that you're gonna listen to me since you've been ignoring me ever since Bumblebee left.

"He's right," Moon said, sitting beside him. "Peacemaker, I know everything's been rough. I know you've been through a lot. But all this aggression isn't you." She gently placed a talon on his.

"Moon, I held Qibli as he died. He told me to tell you that he loves you," Peacemaker said. "I never should have..." He trailed off, his voice breaking. Never should have... what? Ran off? Talked to BlackIce? Argued with Qibli? Not only did he blame himself for Qibli's murder, but he also felt guilt for killing Fennec. But didn't she deserve it? But he wasn't a killer!

"Peacemaker, stop!" Moon said. "It wasn't your fault."

"How would you know!? You weren't there! Hell, if you *were* there, maybe you could've seen or heard Fennec coming!" Peacemaker said, pushing her talon off his.

"So... it *wasn't* your fault," she muttered, looking down. Winter left Bumblebee's side and sat beside the NightWing. He awkwardly and gently put a wing around her. Bumblebee finally stood back up and ran out of the cave, crying.

"Bumblebee!" Mink yelled. She tried to run after her, but Winter got up and stopped her.

"Don't. I'll go talk to her. You stay here with Peacemaker," he said, chasing after the HiveWing.

"No. You should definitely leave," Peacemaker growled. "You *all* should leave." He sidled up beside BlackIce.

"You're a bit close, my friend," he said.

Wait. Peacemaker, don't do it. Seriously, don't threaten any lives here.

Shut. The hell. Up. You can't talk at all. You've done things a million times worse.

He suddenly grabbed the knife from BlackIce's holster and pointed it at whoever got anywhere near him.

"Peacemaker, what're you doing!?" Mink said.

"Whoa, hey! Kid, give me my dagger back now! Do *not* point that at anyone!" BlackIce said, holding a talon up. For the first time, he looked genuinely worried.

"Yeah? Why?"

"That knife is imbued with Dragonbite viper venom. Even the smallest scratch will eventually kill a dragon in an hour. You wonder how I've never failed to kill my targets? *That's* how." Peacemaker tapped the blade.

"I'm certainly learning a lot more about you than I would like in just a couple days," Peacemaker mumbled.

Wait. If just a little cut can kill... I think I might know a way to make

sure no one else gets hurt or killed.

Wait, wait, wait! Peacemaker, that is a terrible idea! Maybe everyone will be safe, but you would be hurting them if you did this. Plus... I'm a part of you, so don't I get a say in this? You'd be killing me too.

Oh, please. You should've been dead two thousand years ago.

Moon immediately stood up when she heard them. "Peacemaker, don't! We all love and care about you!" Moon stepped towards him, and he pressed the blade to his palm lightly. "Qibli and Foeslayer both loved you very much! They would never want you to do this!"

"Who cares!? What happens when I'm dead, huh? Firn won't try to hurt any of you! You'll all be safe!"

"It's not worth it!" Mink said, starting to cry.

"I'M NOT LETTING YOU RISK YOURSELF FOR ME!" He started to press slightly harder, and almost immediately, a fireball slammed into the talon that held the knife, knocking it out of his talon and leaving him clutching the burn in pain.

"That was a bit much," Moon mumbled. Mink went to go pick up the dagger. Peacemaker began to deeply inhale, almost involuntarily.

Hey, don't do it! You're gonna end up killing someone.

It was too late. He blasted black flames in BlackIce and Moon's direction. Luckily, Moon saw it coming and pulled BlackIce down to duck. It hit the rock wall behind them, sizzling and melting the wall.

Peacemaker didn't even know he did it until after it had all happened. He shook his head and rubbed his eyes. When he looked up, all he saw were horrified faces except for BlackIce's, which was full of concern.

"HOLY SHIT!" Kinkajou shouted.

"Alright. You just tried to kill us," Moon said, standing back up.

"Don't touch that stuff. It'll burn you," BlackIce said. Mink quickly handed the dagger back to him. "That means *you* Jet." Peacemaker saw the SkyWing about to poke it, but he pulled away when BlackIce said that.

"I was just looking at it!" Jet said.

He almost felt like passing out. He coughed up a little more of the black essence and stumbled into Coldsnap, who caught him. "BlackIce, he's burning up."

BlackIce went up to him and felt his face with the back of his talon, which Peacemaker swatted away.

Moon! Can you knock Peacemaker out!? I've been a lot more reasonable than him! I know you can hear me!

She started to walk in his direction. "No! You stay the hell away from me!" BlackIce seemed to know what she was doing and he grabbed him. Before Moon could do anything, Peacemaker felt something poke him on the neck, which made BlackIce let go. He reached for it and pulled a dart out of his neck. He looked around and saw Snakeroot putting a blowgun into a small pouch on his chest.

"That really wasn't necessary," BlackIce said.

"Neither was shooting fire at him," the RainWing said. "Besides, he needs sleep."

"He was gonna kill himself!" The hybrid said, taking the dart from Peacemaker.

He was barely holding himself up, so BlackIce held him. He saw Mink slowly approaching him. His head started dropping a bit and she held it and looked him into his closing eyes.

You need this. You haven't slept in days. Maybe you can get your mind a little straightened out when you wake up... and when I take over.

Peacemaker didn't have time to respond before he felt BlackIce gently set him on the ground and everything went dark.

Yes, I know it's been 2 and a half months. Writer's block moment ngl. Not the biggest fan of how this chapter came out, but I will live with my actions.

You two are adorable

Bumblebee didn't look back. She just kept flying until her wings started to get tired. She wasn't even in the Sand Kingdom anymore. It wasn't any sand anywhere. There were grassy plains as far as the eye could see. She was pretty sure she was in the Sky Kingdom. The air was... really smoky. She landed by a stray tree and sat against it. She wrapped all four wings around herself as tears streamed down her face. Her nose was still bleeding. She tried wiping the blood away, only for her to smear it on her talon and and her upper lip. She sighed.

He's right. I should.

A caterpillar started crawling up her leg, which she flicked off. "Sorry, little guy. I'd rather be alone right now."

"I can't let you be alone." Bumblebee yelped when she saw Winter land in front of her.

"What are you doing here!?" Bumblebee said.

"You didn't seriously think no one would follow you, did you?"

"I didn't think *you* would follow me." She tried to wipe her tears away, but they kept coming down. "Can you just leave me alone? Please?"

"I can't let you do that. I'm worried you might do something you'll regret." Winter sat beside her and tried putting a wing around her. She could tell he felt awkward, but it did feel a bit comforting for the HiveWing. "Do you wanna talk?"

"There's nothing to talk about. There's no reason for any of it." She noticed marks on Winter's arms. They almost looked like... scars. "What happened to your arms?"

Winter hesitated. "I was uh... I was kind of in the same boat as you.

Different reasons, but it was still pretty bad. A couple years ago, I may have... attempted on my life."

"Oh my gosh! Moon and Qibli would've been devastated!"

"They're the reason I didn't do it. They both showed up at my house in Sanctuary. Barged open my door right as I was about to do it. I'm guessing Moon saw that I was going to do it long before I actually did. They lived a long ways away from me. Anyways, I just felt... alone. More alone than I ever had. I also felt like a piece of shit. I treated them all horribly. I also felt like I didn't have a family. I wasn't banished from the Ice Kingdom anymore, but the only IceWings who actually wanted me there were Snowfall, Hailstorm and Lynx. Mink didn't really know me then since Snowfall never wanted me to see her. Anyways, Moon and Qibli came in and talked me out of it. Sometimes, I wish they didn't. Thoughts like that always linger. Hell, I was really tempted when Qibli died. But I couldn't leave Moon alone, especially after losing someone she loved so dearly. I'm fighting those thoughts like you, Bumblebee. But things have gotten quite a bit better for me. I have no doubts things will get better for you too."

Bumblebee started leaning against the IceWing harder. "Yeah, but nobody told you to kill yourself."

"My sister did. I was there for her trial and when she passed me, she tried to kill me in front of everyone. The guards pulled her away from me and she shouted at me to do it. That was when I was nearing the peak of it all too." He wiped some tears away from her face. "Don't let those thoughts win like I did. I know things are rough now. Life sucks. I won't lie to you. But it'll get better. You're still young. You've got your whole life ahead of you. Don't listen to what Peacemaker says about you. He's got some issues going on."

This was *not* what the HiveWing thought Winter was like. She was expecting a grouchy asshole who didn't care about how others felt. Instead, he seems like the exact opposite. They sat in that position for awhile in silence, with Bumblebee leaning against Winter, and his wing around her.

"Why is the air so smoky?" Winter asked, breaking the silence. He

looked around the other side of the tree. "Holy shit. That might explain it." Bumblebee got up and looked at what he was looking at. A giant ashy smoke cloud was rising high into the air in the distance.

"Could it be a forest fire?"

"Maybe. But... It looks more like it came from an explosion. Wanna go check it out? Someone could be hurt and/or dying. They may need some help." Bumblebee nodded.

"Yeah, I guess." They took off and shortly after, Bumblebee remembered something. "Wait! Isn't this the direction of the Sky Palace!?" The realization must have dawned on Winter too because he immediately started flying much faster. Bumblebee followed quickly.

Cliff! Oh my god, PLEASE tell me he's alright!

She started flying faster than Winter, the worry fueling her. The smell of smoke was getting stronger and stronger as they got closer to the smoke cloud. Sure enough, the palace was on fire, and the town around it was mostly destroyed. SkyWings were flying around, putting out the flames.

"There's Ruby!" Winter said, pointing through a hole in the palace roof. "Your Highness!" The Queen looked up through the hole. Bumblebee noticed that she was bleeding in multiple different spots. One SkyWing looked as if they were changing her bandages.

"Winter? Bumblebee?"

"What happened here!?" The HiveWing asked, landing in front of her.

Ruby sighed. "The SeaWings attacked us a few days ago. Coral is dead. Tsunami is now queen. Been trying to put out fires for awhile now. My son is unconscious in the hospital, and I haven't slept in days."

"Something *I* advised against," the healer said.

"Shush. Why are you two here?"

"We saw the smoke. Need some help putting out fires?" Winter said.

"I would appreciate that."

"Cliff is in the hospital!? Can I go see him!?" Bumblebee asked.

"Yeah, sure." Bumblebee started to run to the hospital, but stopped and looked back at Winter.

"Go on ahead! I'll be here!" Bumblebee nodded. She ran through the destroyed palace, running by some bodies.

Wow. The SeaWings attacked a few days ago and there's still bodies everywhere.

She reached the hospital and gasped quietly. Every single bed was taken by a SkyWing. She noticed green scales sitting beside a bed, their back turned to the HiveWing.

"Auklet!" The SeaWing turned around and her face lit up.

"Bumblebee!" The HiveWing ran over to her to give her a hug, but she stopped for three reasons. She saw that one of Auklet's legs was wrapped in a cast, her chest was bruised and slightly purple, and she was... holding a sleeping SkyWing dragonet? "Hey, what happened to your nose?"

"Aww! Who's this?" Bumblebee asked, ignoring the question.

"This is Tornado: my new daughter." At first, Bumblebee didn't believe her. But there was no trace of her usual sarcasm. And the way she was cradling Tornado as if she was really hers really said a lot.

"Well, she's precious." She looked at the SkyWing lying on his side unconscious on the bed. It was definitely Cliff. His back was completely burnt, but it looked like it was cleaned up a bit. The right side of his face was covered in burns, and his horn on the same side was half missing. "He looks awful."

"Well, he still has that handsome face of his," Auklet said. Bumblebee smirked at her, and she seemed to have just realized what she said as she blushed. "Um- what are you doing here? Aren't you supposed to be back in Pantala?"

Bumblebee's smirk faded. "Um... I guess I was really worried about Peacemaker. When he left Jade Mountain the day Firn showed up, he went to go talk to BlackIce. I was really worried about him."

'What!?" Auklet shouted, making Tornado jump. "He talked to BlackIce!? What was going through his head to make him do that!? Did Darkstalker force him!?"

"No. It was Peacemaker's idea. But... I don't think BlackIce is all that bad. He seems to actually care about Peacemaker's wellbeing. Anyways, I start flying to the cave BlackIce lives in, and as I flew over Possibility, I took a small break, and saw Peacemaker's face on a wanted poster for murder. I didn't believe it until a SandWing told me he killed Fennec because SHE killed Qibli! BlackIce found him again and brought him to his cave to keep him safe, and he is LOSING it! I just came from there! I left because..." Does she tell her? She loves Auklet and trusts her with her life, but she's been through a lot and she doesn't want to add another worry to all of that.

"Because...?"

Bumblebee sighed. "He punched me and... told me to... kill myself."

"Are you fucking serious? That's *not* okay!"

"Well... he's not really himself right now. He's been through so much more than all of us combined in just the past couple of months," Bumblebee said.

"Bumblebee, that's *no* excuse for what he said. He doesn't deserve any slack for that."

"Auklet, the first time I saw him after Qibli died, he completely broke down. As much as it hurts, I'm not gonna hold it against him."

"Well, I am. You should too. You should not kill yourself! If you

ever do, I will kill you!" Bumblebee gave her a sad smile and wrapped her wings around her. She could feel Tornado brushing against her chest. She pulled back and saw the dragonet yawning. She tilted her head at the HiveWing.

"Hi, sweetie." She held a talon out and Tornado reached her own front talons out.

"Freeble beep!" She shouted.

"Bumblebee."

"Burbur dee!" Bumblebee smiled and took her in her own talons. Auklet sat back down beside Cliff. Tornado nestled into the HiveWing's arms.

"She's kinda lazy," Bumblebee joked.

"Seriously! She's been asleep ninety percent of the time!" Auklet said. A SkyWing went up to the SeaWing and looked at her leg.

"I thought I told you not to get your cast wet," she said.

"Yeah, but I can't really last long without water, so... sucks to suck, doesn't it, Sunrise." The SkyWing sighed as she unwrapped it. The scales underneath were bruised and slightly purple like her chest. "Trust me, it looked a lot worse yesterday."

"BUMBLEBEE!" The HiveWing jumped and turned to see a familiar SkyWing running towards her.

"GALE!" She gave Tornado back to Auklet and jumped into the SkyWings wings. She almost felt like crying. Oh, she missed having Gale's wings around her. "I missed you so much!"

"I missed you too! You were all I was thinking about when we got attacked! I was arguing with my mother, and she got blown up!" Bumblebee buried her head against Gale's collarbone. "How have you been?" she asked in a low voice.

"Clearly not as bad as you must be feeling," the HiveWing said.

"Actually... I don't really know how I'm feeling. I mean, I loved her, but I didn't *like* her." The SkyWing held Bumblebee's head and made her look her in the eyes. "Now, are you okay? You look like you've been crying for hours."

"Long story short, no. I'm not okay. I'll tell you about it later."

"Alright." Gale pressed her head against Bumblebee's.

"You two are adorable, it makes me wanna throw up," Auklet said nonchalantly. Her leg was freshly wrapped and Sunrise was picking up gauze.

"I'm gonna make you pay me if I have to change it again," she said.

"You know jokes are supposed to be funny, right?" When Sunrise stood up, she "accidentally" stepped on Auklet's broken leg, making her yelp in pain.

"Oops," she sighed, walking off.

"Son of a bitch," the SeaWing muttered.

"Bebe!" Tornado exclaimed.

"Oh! I got her!" Gale said. She took Tornado and walked off.

"What?" Bumblebee asked.

"Oh, 'bebe' is her way of saying her bladder is gonna explode. Found that out the hard way," Auklet explained. The HiveWing giggled. She sat beside the SeaWing and stared at Cliff. She thought she saw one of his arms shift slightly. And then his face suddenly furrowed in pain. "Ohmygosh, Cliff!?"

"Auklet?" He muttered so quietly, Bumblebee almost couldn't hear him.

"Hey," she said softly. "I'm here. You're safe." She gently put a talon on the clean side of his face, which he leaned into.

I knew it! Auklet loves Cliff!

"How long have I been out?" Cliff mumbled.

"A few days. Not too long," Auklet said, gently rubbing his head. His eyes weren't open yet. He didn't even seem fully conscious yet. He groaned in pain. He slowly reached for one of Auklet's talons and she caught it. "A very stressful few days. I was scared you'd never wake up."

"Heh. You're not getting rid of me that easily." He keeps trying shift in the bed, but he keeps wincing in pain. He opened his eyes slightly and smiled a little when he saw Auklet's face.

"Your eye!" Auklet gasped. Cliff turned his head enough for Bumblebee to see that his eye on the burnt side was foggy and grey.

Cliff finally noticed Bumblebee was there. He opened his mouth to speak, but Gale came in. "Auklet! Tornado said her first real word! She called me- OH! Cliff!"

"Hey, Gale." Auklet took Tornado from the SkyWing.

"Gale, could you let Ruby know Cliff is awake?" Auklet asked. She nodded and headed off.

"Who's this?" Cliff asked, looking at Tornado.

"This is our- MY new daughter, Tornado. Her mother was kind of a piece of shit and I found her egg abandoned outside in some debris. I said I'd adopt her. I won't make her your problem and I won't make you take care of her. I just felt bad, I guess," the SeaWing explained.

"Hey, of course I'd take care of her. She is *our* daughter, after all." Auklet's face lit up immediately and squeezed his talon in hers.

"You two are adorable," Bumblebee said. "But how are you feeling?"

"Um. Not great. Everything hurts. A lot. Where's Trench?"

"He left with Tsunami and Anemone," Auklet said.

"Cliff!" Bumblebee saw his mother rushing over to the bed her son

was in. "Ohmygosh, your eye!" Winter brushed against the HiveWing's shoulder, making her jolt slightly. Gale walked past them to Cliff's side.

"I'm fine, Mom. Really."

"Liar. You just said everything hurts," Auklet said.

"Well, I'm not surprised. Although, I do wonder why you got the worst of the explosion," Ruby said, holding one of his talons. "I'm happy you're awake, though. I don't think I could've handled losing my son."

She's a good mother. I don't know how Cliff would be if she had been killed. Maybe he would've turned out like Peacemaker.

Just thinking about Peacemaker made her want to cry. She missed the poor, sweet, innocent dragon that he used to be. Not what he's become.

I guess it's hard not to change a lot when you've experienced so much loss of loved ones. Not to mention the fact that there's an angry IceWing trying to kill him.

"Hey," Winter said softly, putting a wing around the HiveWing. "What's wrong?" Bumblebee didn't even realize she was crying. She wiped her tears away quickly.

"N- nothing. I'm fine."

"Winter! I didn't know you were such a softie!" Winter grumbled as they looked back to see a yellow and pink RainWing and an IceWing: Kinkajou and Mink, who looks like she's been crying for awhile.

"Do you pride yourself on making me hate myself whenever I finally decide to be vulnerable?" Winter deadpanned.

Mink put her wings around Bumblebee. This was the most genuine hug she had ever given her. But she couldn't really tell if it was because she wanted to give her a hug, or because she, herself, needed one. Either way, it didn't matter. Bumblebee leaned into her

friend, her head against her chest.

"I'm so sorry, Bumblebee. You didn't deserve any of that. I couldn't be happier that you're still here with us. We love you," Mink said. The HiveWing could feel herself start to tear up again. "You're amazing. Anyone who thinks otherwise isn't thinking clearly, which is why Peacemaker said what he said."

"I didn't expect you to leave him."

"Snakeroot tranquilized him. Moon is hanging back with him. She feels like everything was her fault since Peacemaker blamed her. I know he's grieving, but that pissed me off. Moon did nothing wrong." Mink looked past Bumblebee and saw Auklet and Cliff. "Ohmygosh! Cliff!?" She ran over to the bed and knelt down to Cliff's level. Winter and Kinkajou were already standing beside Ruby.

Bumblebee slowly followed Mink, standing beside her. "Hey, Mink," Cliff said. "No Peacemaker?"

"You're... probably not gonna see me with him for a while," Mink sighed.

"Why?"

"Well, he's losing it. He's hurting everyone. He punched Bumblebee. He killed Fennec. Although, that may have been deserved. But then he started blaming Moon for-" she cut herself off.

"They know about Qibli," Bumblebee said.

"Oh."

"I can't even begin to imagine what's going through his head right now," Cliff said.

"Yeah, even Darkstalker has been more rational than him," Mink sighed.

"Yeah, depression does that." Sunrise appeared behind them, making Bumblebee and Mink yelp. Auklet chuckled, which made

her wince in pain, clutching her chest.

"Are you the only doctor here?" Bumblebee joked.

"I'm the Royal doctor, tasked with taking care of the queen and the prince. And by extent, any royalty that visits, should they get injured. That includes you two." She pointed at Auklet and Mink.

"Auklet, where's Turtle?" Winter asked. Kinkajou looked as if she was panicking slightly, her normal yellow and pink turning green.

"He flew back to the Sand Kingdom when he got a letter about Qibli a few days ago. Why, has he not shown up?" Auklet's voice started to fill with worry. Winter shook his head.

"We have to find him!" Kinkajou said, grabbing Winter's arm.

"Yeah, let's go."

"Wait, I'm coming with you!" Auklet said.

"No, you still need to heal," Ruby said.

"I'm fine! Besides, he's my brother! If he's missing, I'm gonna look for him! We're not arguing about this!" Winter sighed.

"Fine. Whatever," he said.

"I'll go too!" Bumblebee announced.

"Then I'm-" Cliff started.

"*No*," Ruby said. "You're not going anywhere. You really *do* need to heal."

"I'll be back," Auklet said. She reached her head over and kissed Cliff. He kissed her back, putting a talon in her cheek. After an awkward second, Auklet pulled away. "Gale, can you take care of Tornado while I'm gone?"

"Of course," she said with a slight smirk. Bumblebee and Mink both looked at each other and smirked too.

"D-don't look at me like that!" Auklet said to them, blushing. She gave Tornado to Gale and walked over to Winter and Kinkajou, completely embarrassed.

Bumblebee turned back to Cliff and gave him a smile. "I'm happy for you," she whispered before following the SeaWing. "Oh, wanna come with us, Mink?"

She thought for a moment, before saying, "no, I think I'm gonna stay here for now. I need a place to rest. I haven't slept in days." Bumblebee quickly ran back over and wrapped her wings around her. "Be safe. You better come back here. I will not be okay if something happens to you. And if you see Firn, slash his throat for me for fucking up my boyfriend's brain."

Bumblebee chuckled. She nuzzled her snout with the IceWing's and twined her tail around hers. "See you later."

"Wrap it up!" Auklet said. "We have to get going!" Bumblebee unwrapped herself from Mink and went over to the group.

"You don't have to come if you don't want to," Winter said.

"No, no, it's okay. It'll help me take my mind off of... everything." Kinkajou was far ahead of the group, impatiently waiting for them.

"Come on!" The RainWing shouted.

"Calm down!" Winter shouted back.

"TURTLE'S LIFE COULD BE ON THE LINE! DON'T TELL ME TO CALM DOWN!" Winter sighed as Auklet passed him to catch up with Kinkajou. As Bumblebee was about to follow, the IceWing stopped her with his wing.

"Are you sure?" He whispered. She nodded. Before he let her go, she quickly hugged him.

"Thank you."

I'm Not Legally Required to Answer That

"Moon, he's safe here!" BlackIce said. "You don't have to stay!"

"I said I would look after him, so that's what I'm gonna do!" She shot back.

"Yeah, and look where that's gotten you guys! Qibli's dead and Peacemaker tried to kill himself! Good job looking after him!" Moon opened her mouth to say something, but closed it. She turned her head away, a tear streaming down her cheek. BlackIce groaned. "Sorry. It wasn't your fault. That's on me."

"Whatever." She wiped her eyes and looked at the sleeping Peacemaker lying in a spare bed. "Why do you even have an eighth sleeping cave if there's only seven of you?"

"It came with the hideout. We also had a SandWing named Sandstone. He left a few years ago and now he owns The Black Talon tavern in Possibility. Anyways, it doesn't matter why. What matters is that Peacemaker is completely safe here so you don't need to be here."

"No! I want to be here when he wakes up!" BlackIce rubbed his eyes in frustration. It wasn't necessarily *bad* that she was there. But he's worried that if Peacemaker sees her, he'll freak out again. "Why do you even care about him? *You're* the one who tried to kill him all those months back."

"I owe him for that," he said. "I was angry and wasn't thinking straight." Moon opened her mouth to say something, but jumped back and yelped when Peacemaker's tail brushed against her. "He's gonna wake up soon. I'm gonna grab a bucket."

"Why?"

"Snakeroot stupidly used the much stronger dart on him. But knowing him, it was probably on purpose. He might throw up when he wakes." He left Moon in the sleeping cave. He peeked into the main cave, seeing what everyone was doing. Jet is failing to flirt with Rattlesnake. Huntsman and Coldsnap are observing the melted hole that Peacemaker made. Landslide is trying to read a scroll with his one eye. And Snakeroot was angrily sharpening a dagger with another dagger. His scales were a hot reddish-orange. He was also sitting on a flipped-over wooden bucket. BlackIce approached the RainWing, who didn't look up at him. "Hey, can I have that?"

Snakeroot tossed him one of the daggers, making the hybrid groan. "I meant the bucket, dipshit," he said, tossing it back. Snakeroot stood up and aggressively threw the bucket at him. He instinctively caught it but stumbled back a bit. "What's up with you?"

"Why's he still here?" BlackIce sighed and rolled his eyes. He began to leave, but Snakeroot called out, "why won't you finish what you started? I thought the 'great BlackIce' always finishes what he starts."

BlackIce turned back to him. "Technically didn't fail."

"You killed his mother. You didn't even kill who you intended to kill. And *now's* your chance!"

"I made a mistake. I'm not killing the kid. What's going on with you? You didn't seem bothered by him a couple days ago."

"I was hoping that when I knocked him out, you would do it! Hell, I thought you would kill Moon too since she was your target a long time ago. You know how I feel about him! You know what he did to me!"

"We've been over this! It was Darkstalker. Not Peacemaker."

"Same goddamn difference!" BlackIce looked around and noticed that everyone in the cave was staring at them. He sighed and turned to walk off but Snakeroot grabbed his arm. "Finish it, or I swear to the moons, I'll do it myself." He let him go, and walked off. BlackIce growled softly and headed back to Peacemaker's sleeping cave. The

hybrid was already awake, but only barely.

"Hey. You alright?" Moon asked, although BlackIce was pretty sure she already knew the answer.

"Fucking Snakeroot," he said, tossing the bucket to Moon. He sat down and sighed. "We're gonna have to get Peacemaker out of here."

"Why?" Peacemaker mumbled so quietly that they almost couldn't hear him.

"Snakeroot wants to kill you."

"Mm. Everyone wants to kill me. I can't go anywhere without getting a million death threats." Moon gently rubbed his bandaged head. He opened his eyes a bit and leaned into Moon's talon. "Guess I'm at a dead end, huh. Not welcome anywhere."

"You're welcome at the SandWing-"

"No, I'm not. I'll be arrested if I go anywhere near there for killing Fennec."

"You had a good reason. It was self-defense. Well... actually, it was more vengeful, so maybe not," BlackIce said. Peacemaker sighed and tried to sit up, but he immediately went a bit paler and Moon gave him the bucket, which he immediately threw up in. Moon averted her gaze until he was done. He spat the rest out and clutched his head.

"Oh shit. It's happening," he said. "Last time I got shot by a tranq dart, Darkstalker slowly took control, and then he came here."

BlackIce took the bucket from him and set it in the corner of the cave. "We'll deal with it when it happens." Peacemaker started swaying a bit, clutching his head. Moon held his shoulder to steady him. His head suddenly perked up and he blinked a few times. "Darkstalker?"

"Look, I know what you're gonna do," Darkstalker said. "But I'm not sure you should. We've experienced enough head trauma."

"Don't really trust you," Moon said.

"Well, I-" before Darkstalker could say anything, BlackIce knocked him over the head.

"BlackIce! He's gonna die if you keep doing that! I'm honestly surprised he hasn't already!"

"I'm sorry, but if *you*, the *mind reader,* don't trust him, then I don't either!" Peacemaker was clutching his head again. He tried standing up, but stumbled into Moon, who put her wings around him. He buried his face in her chest.

"Come on. Let's get you out of here," she said.

"And go where?" He asked. Moon couldn't answer. BlackIce looked down at the ground. Everyone wants him dead in the rainforest and Ice Kingdom. Everyone in the desert wants to arrest him. He sighed.

"Nowhere. You can stay here." Moon and Peacemaker both shared a worried look.

"But Snakeroot-"

"Can deal with it. You can stay here for as long as it takes for this all to blow over."

And whenever Firn gives up on him.

"Oh, shoot. I gotta go. Queen Thorn... has something planned tonight and I need to be there," Moon said. Peacemaker grabbed her before she could leave.

"Wait. What does she have planned?"

"She, uh-" Moon sighed and knelt down to Peacemaker's height. "She wanted to have a funeral for Qibli tomorrow morning and I promised I would help with the set-up."

"I want to come! If it's Qibli's funeral, I should get to be there!"

"Sweetheart, do you know how many guards will be there? I'd love

for you to be there, but they'll arrest you the first chance they get. Trust me." Peacemaker looked down at the ground, a tear going down his face. Moon wrapped her wings around him. "If for whatever reason, Bumblebee comes back here, you better apologize." Peacemaker frowned a bit. Moon looked back at him expectantly.

"Fine," he sighed. He wiped the tear away. Moon affectionately pressed her snout against his.

"I'll be back." She unwrapped her wings and left the sleeping cave. BlackIce grabbed his satchel that was leaning against the wall and buckled it around his chest. Him and Peacemaker walked Moon out of the hideout. After one more hug, she flew off into the night sky.

They went back in and Peacemaker sat on the nearby couch, next to Coldsnap. Snakeroot was giving him a death stare, and if looks could kill, Peacemaker would probably explode. BlackIce saw that Huntsman was still inspecting the hole, so he went up to her.

"Hey. You wanna... talk about our conversation a few days ago?"

"No, not really. Anyways, I think this is a mix of fire and RainWing venom," she said.

"Why do you say that?"

"Well, it burns the same way their venom does, just stronger. Same melting patterns, same pungent smell. It's just much, much stronger."

"It can't be. The venom comes from their fangs. This came from Peacemaker's flamepipe."

"Yeah, I thought about that too. But I don't know what else it could be."

"Maybe it's like a NightWing and RainWing hybrid power? Like when NightWings hatch under full moons?" Coldsnap interjected.

"He never hatched from an egg," BlackIce said.

"Right, but Darkstalker did. Maybe it carried over?"

"It doesn't make sense," Peacemaker said. "Darkstalker was a hybrid too, and he had normal NightWing powers."

"I know, I know. But it's the only explanation we got." BlackIce looked back over at Snakeroot, who... wasn't there.

That can't be good. I should get Peacemaker out of here. I can explain this to Moon later.

"C'mon, kid. I want you to meet someone." Before Peacemaker could object, BlackIce pulled him off the couch.

"Where are you going?" Coldsnap called out.

"Out." BlackIce called back. Peacemaker looked back for a second before BlackIce ushered him forward more. "Keep walking. Don't slow down."

"What's going on?"

"Taking you to meet an old friend."

"Okay, but what's with the hurry?"

"I'll explain when we take off." When they reached the mouth of the cave, they hopped into the air. "Snakeroot was gone. I don't know where he went or if he turned invisible, so I'm taking you somewhere safe."

"Okay? How do you know he's not following us?"

"I guess I don't. Let's land real quick." They glided down, and Peacemaker was about to speak, but BlackIce grabbed his mouth shut. He tried to listen for any wing beats or look for any talonprints being left in the sand. "I guess we're safe." He still didn't *feel* safe though. When they took off again, he kept looking back, but didn't see anything.

Where could Snakeroot have gone? If he's not following us, why turn invisible?

He looked over at the other hybrid who was clutching his head. "Darkstalker being annoying?"

"No, I've been smashed in the head countless times in the past few days."

"Sorry. Should I have just let Darkstalker take over for a while?"

"Maybe. He seems more trustworthy than me," Peacemaker mumbled.

"Hm." When they got close to Possibility, Peacemaker stopped and hovered in midair. BlackIce swung around to face him. "You alright?"

"Yeah. Yeah, it's just... I haven't been back here since..." he trailed off.

"Right. Well, you can't avoid this place forever."

"I can. Easily."

"You shouldn't. If I ran away from my traumas that I've had *my* whole life, I would be stuck in our cave for the rest of my life."

"Mine happened like a week ago."

"Alright, fair point." They hovered in the air in silence for a bit. BlackIce suspected he was talking to Darkstalker because he was looking frustrated. He eventually sighed and flew past BlackIce and towards Possibility. "Hey, thanks Darkstalker!" BlackIce said, flying after him.

"He didn't say anything. I was just psyching myself up for this," Peacemaker said.

"Oh. That's the spirit."

They landed in the somewhat busy street, where Peacemaker kept his head down. As expected, his rainbow wings drew quite a bit of attention, which got them stopped by an angry-looking IceWing. He glared at Peacemaker, then at BlackIce.

"Aren't you BlackIce?" He growled.

"What? No. I think you got me mixed up with someone else." He put a wing around Peacemaker.

"Mhm. And aren't you Peacemaker?" The hybrid didn't answer. He just kept his head down.

"No. He's my son. We're just out for a midnight walk around the city."

"Then why does he look so nervous?"

"Well... because he's shy and you're freaking him out." Peacemaker leaned into BlackIce and he wasn't sure if it was to sell it more, or for comfort.

"How stupid do you think I am?"

"Until you asked that question... very. How much to keep your mouth shut?"

"Five thousand and ten gold."

"What!? Why such a high and specific number?"

"For your combined bounties."

"Oh shit, really? How much is mine?"

"Five thousand."

"Aw, you hear that, bud? Your bounty is 10 gold. You're moving up in the world." He heard Peacemaker grumble under his breath. "Anyways, why does he have a reward? I thought he was only wanted for questioning."

He reached into his satchel around his chest and pulled out several talonfuls of gold coins and gave them all to the IceWing.

"How much of this was legally obtained?"

"All of it. I was an assassin during the war. That shit paid way better

than it should have. Can we move along? We have somewhere we need to be."

The IceWing looked at the dozens of differently sized coins, the sizes representing how much they were worth. "I'm gonna count them."

"Oh, moons, please don't. Can't you just be a generous dragon and let us go with that? You're practically rich now."

"Hm. Fine. Just this once. But if I see you again, I'll make you pay me again. And I *will* count next time."

"Yeah, good luck with that." He ushered Peacemaker past the IceWing.

"GOOD LUCK PAYING EVERYONE IN POSSIBILITY TO KEEP QUIET!"

"We shouldn't have come here," Peacemaker muttered to BlackIce.

"At least here, you don't have an invisible RainWing trying to kill you."

"Right. Because now I have an entire city wanting to kill me. Big step up." They walked through the streets, getting more and more weird looks, and even having to hide from guards twice.

Hiding in an alley, they saw their destination. A building called "The Black Talon". There were dragons of all tribes going in and out. Most of them were drunk, and those who weren't were trying to keep their drunk friend from collapsing.

"I don't drink," Peacemaker said.

"And you don't have to. But Sandstone can keep you safe much better than I can. There won't be any RainWings trying to kill you in there," BlackIce replied.

"How do you know?"

"Just trust me."

"I *don't* trust you."

"Excuse me? Who's the one who's kept you safe for the past several days? Who is it that brought you here to keep Snakeroot away from you?"

"Who is it that killed my mother?" Peacemaker mumbled. BlackIce sighed and ushered him to the tavern, avoiding dragons on the way. He held the door open for Peacemaker and he followed behind.

There was a lot of chatter from drunk dragons. They had several eyes on them, something Peacemaker certainly seemed to notice as he folded his wings in as much as he could.

"BLACKICE!" A familiar voice shouted excitedly. BlackIce looked over at a SandWing approaching them.

"Hey, Sandstone!"

"Shit, how long has it been?" The SandWing pulled BlackIce into a quick hug. "At least three years, right? Who's this?"

"This is Peacemaker." Suddenly, the tavern got a lot quieter as head after head turned to look at them. Peacemaker lowered his head as he looked around at the eyes staring at him. He especially got death glares from NightWings and IceWings. "We just need a safe place for him to lay low for a while."

"Yeah, well, you know guards almost never come in here. Of course he can stay here." Sandstorm held a talon out to Peacemaker to shake. The hybrid hesitantly shook it. Sandstorm beamed at him.

"It's not just the guards we're worried about. It's also Firn," BlackIce said. The SandWing's smile disappeared.

"Yeah, that makes sense. He'd definitely try to kill Darkstalker with any means necessary, even if he has to kill the kid that's stuck with the bastard."

"Yeah, no shit. So it won't be a problem?"

"Not at all! Now, come have a drink! I have this great, new whiskey

that you *gotta* try!" He grabbed BlackIce's arm and pulled him to the bar. Peacemaker followed. The chatter started to pick up again.

"Whoa, we're not here for a drink," BlackIce laughed. Sandstone hopped over and behind the bar, where there were many shelves full of whiskey and beer. Without listening to BlackIce, Sandstone pulled out two shot glasses and grabbed a bottle of whiskey from the shelf and poured. He slid one to BlackIce and the other to Peacemaker.

BlackIce took it from the other hybrid. "He's only five," he said.

"Oh. Well, he can have as much as he wants in a year," Sandstone said, taking the second glass from BlackIce. The hybrid gulped it down and winced at the burning sensation in his throat.

"Fuck! That *really* burns going down! You're not poisoning me, are you?" Sandstone chuckled.

"No, I've done enough prison time." He gulped down the other glass. "Not really a fan. Stay outta prison, kid." BlackIce looked over at the other hybrid, who's face seemed a bit paler.

"Hey," BlackIce said to him, kneeling slightly to get eye to eye with him. "Don't worry about it. With Moon at the funeral, she can explain to Thorn what happened." Sandstone slid a tall glass of water to Peacemaker, who took it and started gulping it down immediately. When he finished, he exhaled and set the glass down.

"Haven't had water in awhile?" The SandWing asked. Peacemaker shook his head. "Don't you give him water, 'Ice?"

"Don't call me that. I offered him water when he was staying with us. He refused to take it."

"The thought of drinking water made me feel sick. But then I threw up and now I suddenly feel desperate for some water."

"Yeah, it does that to you. Anyways, how's the wife, Sandstone?" BlackIce asked.

"Great!" He said, taking Peacemaker's glass and refilling it. "We have

an egg that's gonna hatch in a month. How are things with Huntsman?"

"We uh... we broke up."

"What? I don't remember that happening," Peacemaker said.

"It happened shortly after Qibli 'saved you' from me with Moon and Winter. Afterwards, I needed some alone time, and that's when I ran into you getting your ass kicked by Firn. She wanted to have dragonets at some point, but... I can't."

"Oh. Yeah, I guess it's a scary thing to think about."

"No, I mean... I *can't."*

Peacemaker looked confused until it looked like realization had struck him. "Oh."

"I guess dragonets mean so much to her that she broke up with me. It is what it is, I suppose."

"Your majesty!" Sandstone suddenly called out. The two hybrids turned around to see two IceWings approaching the bar. One IceWing wore a crown and had pieces of jewelry scattered around her body. The other looked about the same age and had freckles. The IceWing patrons around the tavern bowed deeply.

"Sonuvabitch," BlackIce muttered to himself. Peacemaker gasped softly when he saw the queen. She stopped in front of the bar next to BlackIce, standing... not so regally. In fact, she was slouching slightly.

"Sandstone, there's someone else I need help finding," she said in a slightly hushed voice.

"Who is it?"

"My sister."

"Crystal or Mink?"

"Mink."

Peacemaker's breathing hitched when she said that.

"I don't have any info about her. Sorry."

"C'mon, you've helped me find so many missing dragons in the past. What's stopping you now?"

"Lack of any info. I usually hear some chatter from patrons, but I haven't heard anything about her. I'm sorry." Snowfall sighed and rested her head down in her talons and the other IceWing put a wing around her.

"Don't worry. We'll find her," she said. The other IceWing looked at BlackIce. "Hey, isn't he the guy your mother knew?"

Snowfall looked at him. "BlackIce."

"Your highness." She tried to look at Peacemaker, but BlackIce blocked her field of view. "Yeah, your mom and I were pretty close."

"Oh really? She never mentioned it. Except maybe a few thousand times. Sandstone, can you give me something strong? Seeing him brought up some really bad repressed anxieties."

"What? I didn't even do anything to you," BlackIce said.

"For the first three years of my life, I thought you were my dad! And that thought *terrified* me!"

"Oh. Me too. When she had Crystal's egg, I thought I was her dad too. Took a lot of your mom telling me to 'shut up' for me to get that thought out. Thank goodness it wasn't true." He looked over at Sandstone, who had a very shocked look on his face. Then at Peacemaker, who looked mortified. "What?"

"You and Mink's mom..." Peacemaker didn't finish that sentence. BlackIce glanced at Sandstone again, then at the Queen, who was looking at him disgustingly.

"I'm not legally required to answer that."

"You didn't force her, right!?" Snowfall questioned.

"Of course not! There's a lot to that story. Like-"

"I don't want details! Lalalalalalala!"

"Wait, holy shit!" The other IceWing exclaimed. "You're Peacemaker!"

Snowfall's head jerked up and looked at the hybrid. She pushed past BlackIce and grabbed Peacemaker's shoulders and pinned him against the bar.

"Where's Mink!? I *know* you two are dating and I *know* how much she loves you! When I heard you were Darkstalker, I almost came after you to keep Mink safe, but I decided to give you a chance. She said she would come home this break, but now, I don't know where she is and I'm blaming you! I checked the school and Starflight said she wasn't around! Where is she!?"

"I-I don't know!"

"You don't know!?" The whole saloon was staring at them. "If you did something to her-"

"He didn't do anything to her! Calm down!" BlackIce said, pulling her away from him.

"Why should I listen to you? You're lucky I haven't arrested you," she said, shrugging him away.

"W-we got into a little fight. Nothing physical, but it was pretty heated. I got tranquilized and she left with Kinkajou. I don't know where she is."

"God DAMMIT! Any ideas, Lynx?" The other IceWing, whose name appears to be Lynx, shook her head.

"I don't think threatening her boyfriend is gonna help anyone," she said.

"She went after Winter, who went after... someone we know. I don't

know where they ended up. I'm sorry." He leaned against the bar again and took a drink of his water.

He can't even bring himself to call Bumblebee his friend anymore. He may have told her not to say anything, but she did the right thing. Everyone would've been in a panic looking for him, otherwise. But... I guess everyone is angry with him too. At least they know he's alive though.

"Useless sonuvabitch. I have no idea how she even fell for you," Snowfall growled. BlackIce could see Peacemaker clenching the glass hard, his arm tensing. "She could do so much better."

The glass suddenly shattered in his talon. He winced slightly and shook his talon, which started bleeding profusely. Most of the patrons turned to look in their direction for a second, but turned back to whatever they were doing.

"Here, come around the bar and wash out any glass that's stuck in your talon," Sandstone said.

"Sorry," Peacemaker grumbled, going around the bar.

"Don't worry about it. Shit happens." He turned a knob on a keg and water started pouring out, and Peacemaker put his talon under.

"That wasn't very nice, Snowfall," Lynx said.

"I don't care! He made my little sister run off!" The queen said. She turned to walk out, but bumped into a SkyWing who looked like he'd been through a battle. He had burns and scratches scattered around his body that looked a few days old.

"Sorry, your majesty," he said in a somewhat raspy voice. He limped over to a table with a couple other beat-up looking SkyWings.

"Wow. There are a lot of SkyWings here," Snowfall said.

"Yeah, after the SeaWings attacked them, a lot of SkyWings have been coming here to drink the physical and mental pain away," Sandstone explained, turning the knob on the keg to stop the water.

"Attack? What attack?" BlackIce asked.

"How sheltered are you?" Snowfall said. He wasn't really sure if she was joking or not. "The SeaWings attacked the SkyWings. Pretty much destroyed the kingdom. Queen Coral was killed by Tsunami."

One look at Peacemaker and BlackIce could already tell what he was thinking about. "I'm sure your friends are fine, kid."

"You don't know that," he said as Sandstone started wrapping his talon with bandages that he kept under the bar.

"Who are your friends?" A random SkyWing shouted from across the bar.

"Prince Cliff and Princess Auklet."

"Oh. Yeah, they're alive. Auklet is doing okay. A broken leg, if I remember, but she's fine. The prince, however... he's been better. I don't know if he's woken up yet, but he's been hospitalized. But I'm sure he's okay. He just got a full blast from a dragonflame cactus," the SkyWing explained.

When Sandstone finished wrapping his talon, Peacemaker looked down at it and opened and closed it a couple times. He sets his talon back down on the ground, and, without looking up, he says, "I'm glad they're okay."

"Don't *seem* that glad," Snowfall said.

"Well, *maybe* you don't know *my* side of this whole thing. To you, Mink just *has* to be the saint!"

"To be fair, I'm kind of on Mink's side too," BlackIce said. Peacemaker glared at him before turning back to Snowfall. He hopped over the bar. BlackIce turned to Sandstone. "A five year old just gave me a death glare."

"I have my own goddamn problems and I'm keeping Mink and the others from getting themselves wrapped up in them!" The bar had gone silent, everyone listening to the hybrid rant on. "But of course, they just *have* to make it so FUCKING difficult!"

"There is no way that was all to keep them safe. There was some genuine hatred behind that 'kill yourself' and that punch. And Moon just mentioning Bumblebee's name seemed to bother you," BlackIce said calmly.

"Bumblebee? The HiveWing?" Lynx asked.

"Good to know he's a dick to all of his friends," Snowfall mumbled.

"Okay, you and I really need to have a talk about your escalations."

BlackIce put a talon on Peacemaker's shoulder, but he shoved it off.

He's getting really heated now like back in the cave. And what's worse is that I don't have any tranquilizer darts with me.

"Calm down, kid. I just wanna help you," BlackIce said.

"Can you, for once, just *stop* pretending like you give a shit about me!? You've tried to kill me! You killed my mother! And if you actually did feel guilty for it, you sure as shit didn't show it because you broke my arm when I tried to kill you! And when Darkstalker dragged me to your little hideout, you almost killed me then!"

"I thought you said you weren't mad at me about all that anymore."

"I was trying to get all the others to screw off."

"I do care. I really do. Those were all mistakes. We talked about this." Peacemaker opened his mouth to speak, but Lynx cut him off

"What's going on outside?" She asked. BlackIce heard commotion going on outside and he looked up at the door from the hybrid.

"BLACKICE! PEACEMAKER! COME ON OUT! I GOT A SURPRISE FOR YA!"

Oh no...

Peacemaker seemed to recognize it too, because he immediately bolted out the door. BlackIce followed and saw and saw Firn holding a SeaWing who seemed to be barely clinging to life. He had

bleeding gashes all across his body.

"Prince Turtle!?" Snowfall said behind the hybrids.

"I thought his scales were impenetrable or something," Lynx said.

"Oh, hello your majesty. Didn't expect to see you here. Yes, we took a little trip and destroyed that stupid shell he enchanted. Luckily, he had a piece of coral enchanted to find anything he wanted, so I made him bring me it," Firn explained.

"How could you have forced him to do anything if you couldn't hurt him?" BlackIce asked.

"Easy. He has a soft spot for that RainWing. You threaten her, you can make him do anything." Some guards finally showed up, pointing spears at Firn, who didn't look phased. "I'll make this easy. Give me Peacemaker, and I give you Turtle. If you don't, he dies. Simple."

"Don't," Turtle rasped out, spitting a bit of blood out.

"How did you know we were here?" BlackIce questioned.

"I have my ways. Now make a decision!"

Peacemaker took a step towards Firn, but BlackIce spread a wing out to stop him. "If you kill Turtle, you're going to prison."

"Am I?"

"BlackIce, let me go," Peacemaker said.

"Thirty seconds. Let him go or the SeaWing dies," Firn warned.

Shit. Shit shit shit.

He reluctantly moved his wing and Peacemaker slowly stepped towards Firn, who threw Turtle to the ground. He grabbed Peacemaker and jabbed a dart into his neck. But he didn't just poke it enough to inject the poison. He dug it into his neck enough to draw blood. He kept it there until Peacemaker passed out.

"Nobody follows me or else this sack of shit dies. That goes for all you guards. Also, you guys suck at your job. You didn't even try to stop me. You just pointed your sticks at me." He grabbed Peacemaker's wrist and took off.

"Oh fuck. Moon is gonna kill me. She is going to FUCKING kill me! Three fuckin' moons, what is WRONG with FIRN!?" BlackIce shouted. He picked up a talonful of sand and threw it as hard as he could at the wall of the tavern.

"I told you not to do it," Turtle rasped out.

"He would've done it anyway. Probably would have torn through my wing. Guards, can you actually do your job and help Turtle?"

"We sent someone to fetch the doctor. He'll be here soon," one guard said. He turned to Snowfall. "Your majesty, would you like us to take this criminal off your claws?"

Snowfall looked at the guard, then at BlackIce. "No. I'll take care of it," she said. The guard bowed and backed off. Snowfall looked back at BlackIce and nodded her head back at the tavern. She went in with Lynx and BlackIce followed.

"I take it things didn't go well?" Sandstone said.

"Firn took Peacemaker."

"I know. I heard everything. You were right outside the tavern."

BlackIce turned to the queen. "Are you gonna arrest me?"

"No. I was just getting you out of there," she replied. BlackIce nodded a "thank you" and went to the bar to lean against it.

"I need about twenty more shots of that really strong drink. There's no way I can tell Moon what happened while sober."

"You tell her what happened and you can have as many shots as you'd like." BlackIce groaned and banged his head against the bar.

"I'll tell her tomorrow after the funeral." He lifted his head up and

turned to the IceWings. "You two should be there with me."

"It isn't really our problem," Snowfall said under her breath.

"I'll go," Lynx said at the same time.

"Come on, your highness. Maybe Mink will be there?" That got her attention.

"Rrrrrrrrr fine! Tundra can take care of the kingdom for a little while longer, I suppose."

As relieved as he was to hear that, BlackIce couldn't smile. He didn't have it in him. And he didn't know if what he was feeling was stress from having to tell Moon, or guilt about Peacemaker. Probably both.

I have to hope that Firn doesn't kill him. I can't see any reason why he wouldn't, but all I can do is hope. Three moons, I hope that poor kid doesn't die. God, please.

"Never thought I'd see the day," Sandstone suddenly said. "I didn't think you actually had any real emotions."

BlackIce didn't understand what he meant until he felt his face and felt a single tear streaming down. He quickly wiped it away and turned his head. "Can you get me some water?"

"Yeah, sure." BlackIce took a deep breath.

Just hold on, kid. Moon and I will find you. I promise.

I would like to apologize for taking over 9 months to finish this chapter. It probably won't happen again, but I don't think I can promise anything because I can't see the future. Also, thanks to Hyperion_Draws (that's his name on everything. Instagram, Twitter, Reddit, DeviantArt) for giving me the name of the tavern.

Let's Get You That Drink

"There's Thorn's palace," Winter said, pointing at a building in the distance. It was early morning. The sun has risen enough for the sky to their left to be orangish-blue and the rest of the sky to be just blue. Auklet sighed. Her wings were very sore. Maybe it was a bad idea for her to be going out with Winter, Bumblebee, and Kinkajou, but her brother could be in danger. That mattered more.

She looked over at Bumblebee, who's been quiet for most of the flight. Kinkajou has been panicking for the majority of the flight. Winter has been trying to calm her down. And Auklet's been in too much pain to really talk.

I hope Tornado is okay. And I really hate leaving Cliff when he's in that condition. But Mink can take care of him. And Ruby can take care of Tornado.

They made it to Thorn's palace, where there were dragons of all tribes walking and flying around. They landed in the crowd and Winter sighed. "I think we missed the funeral."

Kinkajou turned an ocean blue. "Hopefully we can find Moon," she said. They walked around for a bit before Auklet felt a sharp pain in her chest. She stopped, clutching it. Bumblebee saw her and hung back. Winter and Kinkajou turned to the East side of the palace.

"Hey, you okay?" She asked.

"That flight was hell," Auklet replied. She tried taking a deep breath, but that only hurt more. Bumblebee put two wings around the SeaWing and she leaned against her friend. "My chest is killing me."

"Maybe you should've stayed in the Sky Kingdom," Bumblebee said.

"Turtle's my brother. I want to make sure he's okay."

"Hey, you two! Moon's over here!" Winter called out. Bumblebee helped Auklet walk over to Winter, keeping her wings around her. When they reached him, they turned to where Moon was. Kinkajou was standing there, waiting impatiently. Moon was speaking to Queen Thorn. They both had reddish faces.

They must have been crying. I can't even imagine how they must be feeling. Well... I guess I should know how they're feeling. Still can't really process what happened with Mother and Tsunami.

"Moon! Over here!" Kinkajou called out. The NightWing turned to look at them, then ran over to them and pulled Kinkajou into a tight hug. Thorn walked over to them too. Moon eventually pulled away from the RainWing and ran over to Winter and threw her wings around him. Winter put his wings around her too.

"I'm sorry for missing it," he said.

"It was really nice. Quiet. He would've liked it," Moon said, resting her head against the crook of his neck. Auklet caught a glint in her eye and saw that Moon was wearing Qibli's earring.

It looks nice on her.

"It's too bad Peacemaker couldn't be here," Thorn said.

"Well, you would've arrested him, so maybe it's good he wasn't here," Moon grumbled, pulling away from Winter.

"What? Where'd you hear that from?"

"All the posters around the city!"

"No, no. They say that he's wanted for questioning. We're not arresting him. We just want to hear his side of what happened to Qibli," Thorn explained.

"Oh. Then why is there a money reward for him?"

"Just to be nice."

"Hm. Then I guess I can go get him in a bit." Moon turned to look at

Bumblebee and Auklet. She gently placed a talon on Bumblebee's cheek. "Are you okay? I was really worried about you."

"I can't really say I'm okay. But I'm alive, thanks to him," the HiveWing said, nodding in Winter's direction.

"Princess Auklet," Thorn said. "May I speak with you for a moment?"

Auklet was shocked briefly before nodding and the Queen ushered her away from the group.

"How're you feeling?"

"Physically, mentally, or emotionally?" Auklet joked.

"All of the above."

"Well... I'm a mess right now. My whole body hurts, especially my chest. Everytime I see a SkyWing, I always feel like they want to kill me. And..."

She didn't know what to say next. Sure, she was sad about her mother, but... was she?

She was gonna hurt Ruby and Cliff and all those innocent SkyWings. Maybe even kill them, but... she was still my mother.

"I'm sorry, we don't have to talk about it if you don't want to. I just wanted to make sure you weren't going to... you know," Thorn said.

"I'm still just trying to process what happened. Like, it still doesn't feel real. It all happened so fast."

"Yeah, I feel that," the queen sighed.

"What do you mean he's not here!?" Kinkajou shouted. Auklet and Thorn jerked their heads in her direction. She was a dark green with some blue speckled in.

"I mean he isn't here. I haven't seen him," Moon said. "I'm sure he's fine. He's practically invincible."

"But I want to *know* he's fine!"

"I don't know what to tell you, then. I don't know where he is. Why are you so concerned about him right now?"

"He was with me at the Sky Kingdom," Auklet explained. The group looked at her. "When he got the news about Qibli, he left. Winter told us that you guys had never seen him so we were worried. Especially after what happened to Qibli."

"But I don't know what good killing Turtle would do for Firn," Winter said. "So I'm sure he's fine. Maybe he just got lost or something."

"Then why did you even come along!?" Kinkajou asked, her ruffs turning red.

"Because I knew you would beg me to come," Winter said. "But he's also still my friend, so I'm still at least a little worried about him."

"Would you have any idea where he is?" Auklet asked Thorn.

"Sorry, no. I heard a SeaWing got taken to the hospital in Possibility. Heard he was beaten up pretty good. But with everything that's happened between the SeaWings and SkyWings, I wasn't surprised. Could've just been an angry SkyWing beating him up," the queen answered.

"Hey, who's that?" Bumblebee said. She was looking at four dragons flying in their direction. Two IceWings, a SandWing, and a NightWing.

"Oh, they'll probably be really upset to hear they missed the funeral," Thorn said. "Several others got here a bit too late and were *not* happy."

As the group got closer, Moon recognized one of them. "BlackIce? BlackIce!?"

Just hearing that name made Auklet wince. Bumblebee had said he wasn't as bad as they all initially thought, but she still didn't trust him.

I guess Moon trusted him enough to leave Peacemaker with him. But... I don't see him with them.

"Moon, we gotta talk!" BlackIce shouted out.

"Snowfall!? Lynx!?" Winter exclaimed. "Why the hell are you here!?"

The group landed and Auklet immediately noticed that BlackIce wasn't acting like the assassin she knew. He looks like he hasn't slept in days. He also looked incredibly anxious and saddened. Thorn looked like she was ready for a fight as soon as she saw BlackIce

"No, your highness, it's fine!" Moon said. She turned to the hybrid. "Why can't I read your mind? Did you bring skyfire?"

"Yeah, I feel like this would be much better communicated through our mouths than my brain because this is actually *really* bad."

"Where's Peacemaker?" Bumblebee asked.

"That's what I'm here to talk about. So basically Snakeroot turned invisible, which made me worried that he might try to kill Peacemaker, so I got him out of there, brought him to my friend's bar, and-"

"Hey, quit stalling!" Snowfall said, smacking the back of BlackIce's head. "Tell her now or I will so I can get out of here."

BlackIce grumbled curses under his breath at the Queen before turning back to Moon. He took a deep breath and looked her in the eyes.

"Moon." He took another deep breath. "Peacemaker was taken by Firn last night."

"WHAT!?" Moon and Bumblebee both shouted. Kinkajou gasped, covering her mouth in shock. Winter had an expression of disbelief. Thorn seemed more concerned about Moon more than anything. And Auklet didn't know how she felt. On the one talon, he was always extremely nice to her, actually treating her like a dragon instead of royalty, which she really appreciated. On the other talon,

he hurt Bumblebee and told her to kill herself. That's enough to completely overshadow everything.

"Tell me this is just a sick joke!" Bumblebee cried, grabbing BlackIce's shoulders.

"I wish, but no."

Moon gently pushed Bumblebee and suddenly punched BlackIce in the snout. He stumbled back a bit and cusped his jaw. "WHY DID I TRUST YOU!? YOU SON OF A BITCH!"

"One helluva punch," the SandWing of the group said.

"Who the hell even are you?" Winter asked.

"Oh, I'm Sandstone. I own the Black Talon saloon in Possibility."

"And why are you here?"

"I used to be part of BlackIce's... gang? Posse? Whatever you would call it."

"Whatever. BlackIce, you know Firn best. What are the odds that Peacemaker is still alive?" Winter questioned.

The hybrid looked at the IceWing, then at Moon, who was trembling, tears streaming down her face. He finally hesitantly said, "slim to none."

Moon dropped to her knees, sobbing as Winter and Kinkajou immediately went to her side, putting their wings around her. Auklet's brain turned off. Peacemaker was her friend. More than that, he was a brother to her. More so than her actual brothers, besides Turtle. Even after the terrible things he said and did to Bumblebee. And now he's gone.

Her train of thought was cut off when she heard quick, heavy breaths coming from Bumblebee. The SeaWing immediately got in front of her friend and put her front talons on her shoulders. "What's wrong?"

"I- I did this. I should've just done what he said. I never should have brought you guys to him."

Auklet didn't know what to say. She had no idea how to handle panic attacks. As she was about to try and say something, a white wing gently enveloped Bumblebee in a hug. Auklet took a couple steps back and saw Winter pulling the HiveWing into a hug.

Auklet could see her trembling hard, but her breathing was slowing down slightly as she leaned her head against his chest. "It wasn't your fault. You did the right thing," he said gently.

"Hey, he has more news for you," Snowfall said.

"Hey, one thing at a time," BlackIce said. Snowfall gave him a look that told him to hurry it up. "Auklet, your brother is in the hospital in Possibility. Firn beat him up pretty badly."

Kinkajou's head shot up and she stood up. Moon fell to her side for a brief moment since she was leaning against the RainWing. Thorn took her place, placing a wing around the NightWing. "What happened!?" Kinkajou demanded.

"Firn destroyed whatever was making him immortal or something like that and beat the shit out of him. He made me give him Peacemaker or else he would kill Turtle. Peacemaker told me to, while Turtle told me not to. I didn't know what else to do."

"You could have *not given him to Firn!*" Moon exclaimed.

"And let one of your best friends be killed? Would you have preferred if I did that?"

"No, but-"

"What exactly would you have done if you were in that situation?"

"I don't know, okay!? I don't know what I would have done!" Moon stood up. "But I would have at least *tried* to do something!"

"I'm sorry that I don't have all the *fucking* answers all the time! If I did, Peacemaker would still be alive! Qibli and Foeslayer would still

be alive! Turtle would be okay! Firn wouldn't be the way that he is! I wouldn't have hurt Glacier the way I did, and-" he stopped himself as if he realized what he had said. Sandstone patted his shoulder.

"I've wasted enough time here," Snowfall sighed, turning to Auklet. "Princess, where's Mink?"

"As far as I know, she's still in the Sky Kingdom," the SeaWing said.

"Alright, come on Lynx."

Lynx hesitated for a moment before taking one of Moon's talons in her own. "I'm so sorry for your losses. Truly," she said. Moon mouthed 'thank you' to her. The IceWing went over to Winter and wrapped her wings around him. "And to you. It was really nice seeing you again, even in a bad situation like this."

Winter unwrapped one wing from Bumblebee and put it around Lynx. "Yeah, you too." She backed away and took off after Snowfall.

They stood in silence for a moment before Kinkajou broke the silence. "I'm gonna go see Turtle. Anyone who wants to join me is welcome to. Except you." She nodded at BlackIce.

Auklet got ready to follow the RainWing, but no one else moved. "You guys not coming?"

"I-I'd feel bad leaving now," Bumblebee whimpered.

"Hey, it's okay. I'll come with you if you want." He looked over at Moon who had her face buried in Thorn's chest. "Well, uh..."

She turned her head slightly so that she could speak. "I'll come," she said softly.

"Hon, if you don't want to, you're more than welcome to stay here," Thorn said, lightly stroking Moon's back.

"No, I just... need to do something. Try and get my mind off of... everything."

"Great! Now let's go!" Kinkajou shouted, pacing back and forth.

"Kinkajou!" Winter shouted back. "You're being a lot right now!"

The IceWing unwrapped his wings from Bumblebee. She slowly approached Auklet and she could see that the HiveWing was still trembling a bit.

I hope she accepts that it wasn't her fault. She doesn't deserve to have to carry that kind of guilt.

Winter and Moon began to follow. She caught up to Winter, and the IceWing put a wing around her. "Moon," BlackIce said softly. The two stopped to look at him. "I'm sorry. I truly am." Auklet looked a little closer and saw that there was a single tear going down his cheek.

He really does care about Peacemaker.

"Yeah," Moon mumbled before turning away from him.

"Hey, let's go get you that drink," Sandstone said, putting a wing around the hybrid. "But I'm putting a limit so that you don't get absolutely shitfaced."

"Finally! Let's go!" Kinkajou urged.

"Kinkajou, under any other circumstances, I would punch you," Winter growled.

"I'm sorry! I just... want to make sure Turtle's okay. I love him, and I don't want to lose him too."

Winter sighed, but nodded. That was enough of a response for Kinkajou to take off to Possibility. Bumblebee took off too without saying a word.

"Need help taking off with that broken leg?" Thorn asked behind Auklet.

"No, thanks," the SeaWing called back. As Winter and Moon took off, Auklet tried to follow, but as she pushed off the ground with her hind legs, she cringed from the pain, but she managed to keep herself up by flapping her wings.

As the group flew together, no one said a word.

He's Gonna Kill Me

The streets of Possibility were as busy as ever. There were restaurants and food stands with lines that stretch for dozens of feet. Dragons walking around, carrying goods or whatever they needed for the day.

And there was Silver, who was sitting on a bench, leaning forward and anxiously bouncing his leg up and down.

He's gonna kill me. He's gonna kill me. He's gonna kill me.

That thought kept echoing through his head as he waited for who had told him to be there.

An IceWing passed him in the corner of his eye, which made him jump, but he realized it wasn't who he was waiting for.

He's gonna kill me. Maybe I should run. But if he's not gonna kill me, then he certainly would if I ran. I'm dead either way.

He was about to make a decision before he felt a talon on his shoulder, making him jump up with a yelp. He turned and saw who he was waiting for.

"Hey Silver. Been a bit, hasn't it? Been what? Two, three months?" Firn asked.

"Yeah. W-why did you wanna meet?" Silver asked, trembling.

"Just to catch up. Brought some news that I know you'll love to hear. Take a walk with me." He put a wing around him and began walking, making Silver walk with him. "I'm sure you've heard about Fennec?"

"Y-yeah."

"Gonna miss her. She was angry. Easy to manipulate." He looked

down at Silver with a murderous glint in his eyes. "And she had the guts to do what you couldn't."

"I-"

"Save it. She told me about how once you guys got back to school, you attempted it. In front of everyone. Not entirely sure what your plan was, but you didn't execute it very well."

"Didn't Fennec do it in public?" Silver asked softly.

"She actually thought it through. No one recognized her. She was in and out in a matter of seconds. She killed Qibli and lured him away from the city."

"At least I tried," Silver mumbled.

"Mm-hmm." As they continued walking, Silver watched a group of five dragons entering the nearby hospital. "And as soon as BlackIce showed up, you became a whiny, little bitch. Yes, he has a habit of showing up and fucking everything up. But then you start treating him differently? You were being nice to him. Fennec said she noticed you sneaking glances at him. How you got flustered just from being around him."

"Firn, that's not what you think it was-"

"I don't care what it was. I have no interest in hearing you deny your... interests. It's all dealt with anyway."

Dealt with? That doesn't mean what I think it means, right?

"What do you mean?" Silver asked.

"He's dead. Took him away and killed him myself."

Silver stopped and ducked from under Firn's wing. Firn turned to look at him, completely unphased. "Y-you killed him!?"

Firn sighed. "Keep your voice down. And yeah. Why are you so surprised?"

Peacemaker's dead. He's dead! He killed him!

"Relax. You can still be of some use." He patted Silver's shoulder. "See, I wanna get BlackIce next. But he has too many others around him. One of his little gang members, Moonwatcher, Kinkajou, and Winter. I want you to successfully kill one of 'em. If I had to pick one, Winter might be the easiest. But if you can't kill *one* of them by the next time I see you, I'll kill ya. Hope that motivates you. Who knows when I'll see you again. Could be days. Maybe even years. Think you can do that?"

Silver's mind was absolutely screaming. "Mm-hmm," he squeaked

"Very good." He patted his back before taking off, leaving Silver in the busy streets. Almost immediately, he began thinking about how he could save himself.

I could go to one of the queens and ask for protection! No, no, if I do that, I'll have to explain my involvement with Peacemaker and Firn! Moons, I don't wanna have to actually kill anyone just to save my own ass! Winter might be the easiest to kill, though. BlackIce's gang can fight and kill anyone. Moonwatcher would see me coming a mile away. Kinkajou is a RainWing, so if I mess up even a little bit, I'm getting blasted in the face with venom. Not to mention, she can turn invisible. NO! I SHOULDN'T KILL ANYONE!

He looked at the hospital.

There are always guards there. I could always just tell them I don't feel safe about someone.

He ran to the entrance and opened the door. He was sweating and panting as he was absolutely freaking out. He almost ran back out as soon as he saw the five dragons from earlier. What was worse was who they were. Auklet, Bumblebee, Moon, Kinkajou, and Winter. Kinkajou was yelling at a receptionist, who was calmly telling her to calm down.

"Excuse me, sir?" A cool talon touched his shoulder and he jumped. "Are you okay, sweetheart? You look like you're having a panic attack." She was an IceWing that looked like she worked there.

"N-no! I-I just need a guard! Or someone who can keep me safe!" He began breathing harder and quicker as he clutched his chest.

"Hey, we need a doctor over here! I think he's having a heart attack!" The IceWing shouted. Every dragon in the lobby was looking in their direction, including the group of five. A few dragons, who Silver could assume were doctors, came rushing over.

"Silver!?" Bumblebee yelled.

"No! I-I'm fine! I just-" It felt like the whole room was starting to spin as he felt a pain shoot through his left arm as the doctors began to hoist him up. He was no longer on the ground as he was being carried. It didn't take much longer for everything to go dark and all the sounds to die down around him.

Two chapters in a single week! Super short chapter, but one that I'm actually proud of for once. Especially considering this was written, edited, and published in a single night. What is sleep?

Ups and Downs

Small warning. This chapter gets really depressing at certain points. So be careful.

"It's so weird that I'm a father now," Cliff said, smiling as he was holding a sleeping Tornado. He was sitting up in his hospital bed, his back against the pillow.

It's been rough. They found out that it was incredibly difficult to walk due to some spinal damage, rendering his back legs mostly numb. He said there was still some partial feeling, but Mink knew he was just trying to make it seem not as bad as it truly was.

"Not bad though, right?" Mink asked, tilting her head.

"No. Not at all." He looked down at his daughter as she shifted. She opened her eyes and looked directly at Mink. She tiredly looked around before rolling out of Cliff's arms and onto the bed.

"Are you gonna tell her about her real mother?" Mink asked, catching Tornado as she tried jumping off the bed. She gently placed her on the ground.

"Don't really have a choice considering her mother is a SeaWing now. But yes. I wouldn't wanna lie to her. And I'm sure Auklet would agree." Mink sat back against the wall beside Cliff's bed. She let out a sigh as she rubbed her eyes. "Hey, you alright?"

She tilted her head to look at him before looking away again. "Ever since Firn showed up at the school, everything's gone to shit. Peacemaker's lost it since Qibli died, even threatening to kill himself. I just don't know what to do anymore."

"Pebaker?" Tornado babbled, cocking her head.

"Yeah. Pebaker." Mink pat Tornado's head and she beamed.

"I'm sorry, Mink. I wish there was something I could do." He reached over to place a talon on her shoulder, which Mink leaned into.

"Excuse me, your highness?" Sunrise interrupted. "I'd like to finally get started on some physical therapy and get those legs working again."

"Oh, okay. Would you like me to leave, Cliff?" Mink asked, picking Tornado up and standing.

"I mostly just want Tornado out. I don't want her to see me in pain," he said.

"Alright. We'll be out there if you need me." She pointed to the exit. As she left and closed the door, she almost immediately ran into Queen Ruby with an "*oof!*"

"Oops! Sorry, Mink. I just came by to check on Cliff," she said, rubbing Tornado's head, who excitedly started climbing onto Ruby's arm.

"He's starting physical therapy now, so I think it's best to give him privacy."

"Hm. Well, gives us time to catch up. How have things been at the school?"

"Oh, um... they've been alright. A few ups and downs, but for the most part, it's been nice."

"What about outside the school? How's your sister?"

"I uh- I haven't seen her since the start of the year. There's been so much going on, I just don't really have much time to go see her. But we write to each other often."

"That's good." They sat there in silence for a bit, which was occasionally broken by babbling from Tornado.

"Cliff told us you were planning on backing out of being Queen." Mink scratched the back of her neck.

"Yeah. Not so much for myself. I don't want to put all that responsibility onto Cliff. I know a lot of dragons wouldn't be too happy with a king instead of a queen. And if he marries Auklet... well, the tribe wouldn't be happy."

More silence.

"Did... you know my mother?" Mink asked, fiddling with her thumbs.

"Glacier? Oh yes, I knew her. She was one of the good ones. I was probably closer to her than I was with any other queen," Ruby explained.

"Even more so than Moorhen? I thought-"

"We were allies during the war, but not really friends. Glacier and Thorn are the ones I grew close to after the war. We've had a few drinks together. What do you remember about her?"

Mink thought for a moment. "I only really have one real memory of her. I know I used to sleep beside her when I had a nightmare or something, but... I remember her when she was dying and she chose Snowfall to be the queen." She also remembered someone barging in almost immediately after she had passed.

"Oh, she loved you three very much. You were about the only thing she'd want to talk about. One time when she was drunk, she cried about how you were growing up. I also remember her crying about that BlackIce who shows up on every wanted poster around Pyrrhia. She went into way too much detail about all of that." Ruby looked down at Tornado sadly. "I miss her."

Mink wiped a small tear from her eye. "Snowfall's been a good mother figure to me though."

Did she have a history with him? I thought they just knew each other. I didn't think it went far enough for her to cry over him.

"Good." Ruby looked at the IceWing. "You look so much like your mother."

"Yeah, I've gotten that a lot over the years." She watched as Ruby hovered a claw over Tornado, and the dragonet reached out and grabbed it. "What else did she say about BlackIce?"

"Hm. Well, she was really drunk when she was crying about him. Like, *really* drunk. And it wasn't the usual drunk that we would get from time to time. She was clearly depressed. So it was a little difficult to understand her. Thorn and I didn't wanna get drunk just in case she decided to do something bad. Anyways, she cried about how that feud between the IceWings and NightWings was keeping them apart. Apparently, BlackIce had gotten a lot of shit for being part NightWing from the other IceWings. I guess about a year after BlackIce left, your mother went to talk to him and... it didn't go well. She kept crying about how she wished she could take what he offered her. I guess he proposed that they take you and your sisters and run away from everything. No more responsibilities. She clearly didn't take the offer because she stayed in the kingdom and she got drunk later that day. It was just weeks later when she died."

"I-I didn't realize. I mean, I sort of remember her coming home one day and being a lot sadder and... huggy. She hugged me a lot. I believe that was the same day that Winter and Hailstorm did the Diamond Trial too."

That must've been a terrible few for Mother. Saying goodbye to someone she loved and then losing Winter too? Moons, I wish I could see her again. Even if it was just for a little bit, I would love to see her again.

"That was also the last time the three of us went out before she died. The last time we got to see her was when she was depressed and trying to stop her problems with a bottle," Ruby said, her voice breaking as she tried to keep herself from breaking down into tears.

Mink could hear Ruby's voice breaking, her eyes slightly red. Out of some kind of instinct, Mink leaned against Ruby, and she put a wing around her. Even though IceWings and SkyWings had very different wings, it still oddly felt like her mother had put a wing around her. That same kind of comfort that only mothers could give.

There was another question Mink had, but wasn't sure if Ruby

would be too happy with her asking. "Can I ask you something personal?"

"Shoot."

"Who uh... who was Cliff's father?"

Ruby sighed. She looked as if she was looking for a way to put it. "During my mother's rule, there were breeding programs. She would pair up two dragons to have dragonets. It was mostly optional, but I, being the princess, was forced to participate in it to produce an heir. And, being the princess, everyone wanted to be paired with me. That was a nightmare. But I got paired with an assassin. He was dopey, but he was funny and sweet. It seemed like he was forced to do it too. But I hear he's fallen in with a gang of other assassins, which is sad. I would've liked to catch up with him."

Mink looked down at her talons, realization dawning on her. "How many assassins were there?"

"Two. The other one was super serious about his job and a complete asshole. I got lucky."

Holy shit.

"Jet?"

Ruby snapped her head towards her. "Um... yeah. Do you know him?"

"Kind of. I just can't imagine him having a dragonet with a queen. Or... anyone for that matter." Mink looked back down at her talons. "Small world."

"MINK! There you are!" Tornado jumped in Ruby's arm, startled by the yell. Mink did too, turning to the source.

"Snowfall!? Lynx!?" Mink wrapped her wings around her sister. "What are you doing here?"

"We were looking for you. We went to the Sand Kingdom and met your crazy boyfriend. How you fell for him, I will never understand.

I also met BlackIce and I found out he fucked our mom."

"Yeah, can't really say I'm surprised by that anymore. How's Peacemaker doing?" Snowfall opened her mouth to speak, but closed it. "What?"

"Lynx, can you tell her? I'm bad at this."

Lynx sighed and took one of Mink's talons in her own. "Mink," she said softly. There was sadness in her eyes, which gave Mink a pretty strong hint. "Peacemaker's dead."

"No. No no no. No! H-how!? I mean, *how*!? D-did he kill himself!? Did BlackIce kill him!?" Tears began streaking down her face. "Y-you have to be lying! You *have* to be! H-he's not-" Lynx pulled her into a hug and she began sobbing into her chest hard. Snowfall hesitantly joined in embracing her.

"I'll go tell Cliff," Ruby said softly. Mink heard her open the door and close it.

Lynx was gently caressing the back of Mink's head and neck. "I-I thought BlackIce wasn't as bad as we thought," Mink whimpered.

"He didn't kill him, hon," Lynx whispered. "Firn did. He tried to save him, but Firn had used your friend, Turtle, as a hostage. He forced BlackIce to give him Peacemaker."

"Is this supposed to make me feel better!?" Mink cried, pushing away.

"Sorry. I just thought you'd wanna know what happened."

"Sorry, sorry. I know. You're right. I just... don't know what to do." She wrapped her wings around herself and sat against the wall, tears still streaming from her eyes.

"I should probably feel worse about him dying, but I can't. He talked shit about you. So I say good riddance," Snowfall said.

"Not a good time, love."

"Wh-what do you mean? He talked shit about me?"

"No, don't worry about it. Snowfall was purposely pissing him off," Lynx said, nudging Snowfall. Mink looked at the door Ruby disappeared into, sighing. She stood up, trembling, and went in without saying another word to the others.

She saw Cliff sitting on the edge of his bed, his front talons covering his face, while Ruby was comforting him. She took a deep breath before going further.

Ruby looked up and spotted her. When Mink reached them, Ruby pat Cliff's shoulder to get his attention. He looked up and looked Mink in the eyes. There were tears going down his cheek.

Mink kneeled down and pulled him into a hug. He winced in pain slightly, but he returned the hug. "I-it's not true, i-is it?" He asked. He was trembling just as much as Mink was.

"It is," Snowfall said behind her.

"Mink, I'm so sorry," Cliff whimpered. She hugged him tighter, feeling comfort in his warmth.

"Snowfall, you and I should talk," Ruby said. "Lynx, can you please stay with them?"

"Of course," she said. Ruby and Snowfall walked off, leaving the three of them. "If you don't mind me asking... What was he like? I get the feeling that the version of him I met wasn't really... him."

Mink turned to face her and sat beside Cliff. "He was wonderful. One of the nicest dragons I knew. It all started going downhill when he lost his mother just a few months ago. Losing Qibli drove him over the edge," she explained. She leaned her head on the SkyWing's shoulder, and he put what was left of a wing around her. "I loved him more than anything."

She could feel herself start to tear up again as she buried her head in Cliff's shoulder. The SkyWing gently rubbed her thigh. "How did Auklet and Bumblebee take the news?" He asked Lynx.

"Auklet seemed kind of unphased, but Bumblebee broke down. She started blaming herself, but... I think Winter has a soft spot for her. He made sure she knew it wasn't her fault," she explained.

Cliff sighed. "Auklet wasn't unphased. I think she just has a hard time processing something like this."

They sat there in silence for a bit that was occasionally broken by Mink's sniffling. She almost wanted to go out and find the others, but she knew she shouldn't leave Cliff. "Is Turtle okay?" She whimpered.

"I think so. He got rushed to the hospital. He was pretty beat up, bleeding everything, but the doctors say he'll be alright," Lynx explained.

Mink let out a shaky sigh, scooting closer to Cliff. She buried her head in the crook of his neck. The membrane of the wing around her had many rips, tears, and holes of all shapes and sizes. She wondered if Cliff would ever be able to fly again. Hopefully Sunrise would be able to stitch them up.

Even as she was snuggling against her friend, she felt like she was trapped in a nightmare that she couldn't wake up from, even as she mentally kicked herself in hopes that she would just wake up snuggled next to Peacemaker and they would be on their break the next day and Qibli would be waiting for them to show up to at Thorn's Stronghold with that toothy grin of his.

She felt herself crying more into Cliff's neck, which the SkyWing felt as he pulled her closer. Mink suddenly felt a cool talon placed on her shoulder. She turned her head to see Snowfall with a guilty expression. Ruby was standing behind her, still holding a Tornado.

"I'm sorry. I'm just... bad at dealing with this kind of thing. But you're my sister, and even though I may not have liked him, you still loved him, and I'm really sorry about what happened." Mink broke away from Cliff and hugged her sister, who hugged her back.

"How are you feeling, sweetheart?" Ruby asked Cliff. Mink didn't hear a response, but heard movement as she assumed Ruby went to

hug her son.

"Ready to go home?" Snowfall asked Mink.

"What?" She pulled away from the hug, looking her sister in the eyes.

"Hon, I don't think she's ready to leave yet," Lynx said.

"I-I can't. I-I-I just can't right now. There's so much going on and... I'd feel terrible leaving it all behind," Mink said.

"Alright, I get it." Snowfall let out a sigh. "I'm sorry, but I unfortunately have to head back to the Ice Kingdom. You know how Tundra gets when she's left in charge for too long." Mink forced a sad smile on her face before hugging her sister again.

"I love you," she whispered.

"I love you too." Snowfall pressed her head against Mink's and twined her tail around hers. "I hope I see you again soon."

Mink had no response. She didn't know when she'd go back to the Ice Kingdom.

As Snowfall pulled away, she was immediately hugged again, but by Lynx. "Hope I see you soon too."

Mink was about to bury her head in her neck when Lynx pulled away before she could. "Yeah..."

She sat back down on the bed that Cliff and his mother were sitting on, opposite side of Cliff from Ruby. She watched as her sister and Lynx left the hospital, wrapping her wings around herself, already missing that comfort they brought her.

"Are you gonna be okay, sweetheart?" Ruby asked. Mink looked down at her talons, expecting a response from Cliff. But when he didn't respond, she looked at Ruby and realized that question was directed at her.

"I... don't know," she squeaked out, her voice broken from crying so

hard. Just thinking about Peacemaker made her want to break down into tears again.

Cliff put a wing around her again, but instead of just leaning into him, Mink turned her body towards him and wrapped both her wings around him, holding him as close as possible. He was stunned at first, but eventually put both of his wings around her too.

I know the ending seemed a little abrupt, but thinking about it, it felt like the perfect spot to end the chapter. I finished this on Christmas morning at 3 am. I regret nothing and everything at the same time. Hope you enjoyed this depressing ass chapter and I hope you all have a Merry Christmas or Happy Hanukkah or whatever. If you don't celebrate anything, I hope you have a good day. Sorry I put out so few chapters this year. Life's been a lot lately and I'm just trying to get through it. I'll try to put out more during 2025 but no promises. Have a good rest of the year

Just a Little Walk

Turtle was unconscious when the group entered his spacious hospital room. Kinkajou, of course, freaked out about it, scared he wouldn't wake up until a doctor came in and showed them that they had tranquilized him to ease his pain.

But she especially freaked out when she saw how bad he looked. Though a lot of his wounds had closed up or dried up, he still had a lot more that were being treated, including an infection that had thankfully run its course as the day went on.

Night fell and the group was sitting in chairs that were in front of the room's windows, only a couple feet away from Turtle's bed, where he lay unconscious. Kinkajou, Moon, Auklet, and Winter were asleep, while Bumblebee's brain wouldn't shut up. She leaned against Winter, trying hard to just let herself slip into sleep, but all she could think about was Peacemaker.

Even though Winter told her not to blame herself, she couldn't help it. Every single thought in her brain was screaming at her that it was her fault. She held back tears, feeling like she's cried enough today.

She stands up, but her tail accidentally brushes against Winter, making him stir. He groggily opens his eyes and looks at her. "Hey," he whispered."

"Shoot, sorry. Didn't mean to wake you," Bumblebee whispered back.

"You alright?" Moon, who was sleeping against him, shifted in her sleep.

"Just... can't sleep, I guess. Thought I might just go for a little walk." He stares are her, looking concerned. "What?"

"I just don't really trust you to be on your own."

She cocks her head a bit. "I can take care of myself, you know."

"It's not that."

It took her a second to realize what he meant. "It's just a walk. I promise. I probably won't even leave the hospital."

She stepped out of the room and began her walk.

It feels... oddly comforting that Winter was worried about me.

Not that he was actually worried. He probably just pretends to do this to keep Mink happy. Hell, she probably doesn't even care. She's probably too busy worrying about Peacemaker to give a shit about me. They all are.

Peacemaker...

She could feel herself spiraling. Every single thought she wants to bury deep down just comes right back up, overwhelming her.

Th-they do care... right?

They don't care about me. They've all got their own things to worry about. It's selfish for me to even think like that. They shouldn't have to worry about me.

They shouldn't worry about me. They shouldn't even care about me. Maybe Peacemaker was right. I should just-

She turned a corner in the hall and slammed into an IceWing, feeling their cold scales hit her. She fell back onto the ground and gathered herself for a moment. "Sorry," they both said.

She looked up at the IceWing and noticed it was a familiar face. "Oh! Silver!" She quickly stood back up. "I'm sorry, I should have been paying attention."

"It's... fine."

"Are you alright? I saw you get carried off. You seemed really freaked out."

Silver looked down at the ground. "Just a mild heart attack," he mumbled. "I'm okay. They said it could happen again if I get into another stressful situation, but... I think I'll be fine."

"What- uh... what caused that?"

He winced. "None of your business!" He immediately looked a tad bit guilty after that, like he didn't mean to lash out. He sighed, looking back down at his talons. "I... I'm sorry about Peacemaker."

"You... know about it?"

"Well... what Firn did was pretty public, and I-" he cut himself off. "I-I just heard about it from someone. How's Mink handling it?" He leaned back against the hallway wall. Bumblebee leaned her back against the wall beside him.

"I have no idea. She's in the Sky Kingdom. Queen Snowfall went to go see her, and I'm assuming she told her. And Cliff was probably with her when she heard." She looked up at the ceiling. "You know... the last time I saw him, he punched me in the face. He wasn't himself. Like... every bit of repressed anger he had was let out, and he took most of it out on me. Until I ran off, that is. I was genuinely considering..." she sighed, rubbing her temples.

She looked over at the IceWing, who looked like he was breathing a little harder. "Whoa, are you alright?" She asked. She touched his shoulder and he flinched.

"Y-yeah, I just..." he paused for a moment. "Can I tell you something? Without judgment? I don't really wanna tell you, but... I just feel like I need to tell someone about it. I don't have anyone else I can talk to."

"Yeah, sure."

He took a deep breath. "I... was sort of... paid by Firn to kill Peacemaker."

"You *what*!?"

"I know, I know. When the continent found out about him, I was

pissed. I probably would've tried to kill him for free. I ran into Firn in the Ice Kingdom and he somehow knew that I knew Peacemaker. Not sure how. But he offered a *lot* of gold to kill him. Remember when that break ended? I tried to kill him the first chance I got, but I clearly failed. I would've taken another chance to, but I always had someone watching me, whether it was Clay or Tsunami or Moon.

"I finally had a chance to. I probably would've done it too, even with Mink there. But then... BlackIce came in, and I freaked out. When Peacemaker's mom died, I didn't have it in me to kill him anymore. I felt like he had been through enough. And then I actually-" he looked at Bumblebee before shutting up. He grasped his forehead with both talons, also covering his eyes.

"You actually what?"

He grumbled under his breath before he looked back up at the ceiling. "I... think I may have..." he mumbled something under his breath that Bumblebee couldn't hear.

"What was that?"

"Ughhhh, it's just hard to say out loud. I can barely even admit it to myself. Alright..." he took another deep breath. "I think I... loved him."

"You too!?"

"Wait, what?"

Did I really just say that?

"I-I mean, I kept trying to push it down because he was with Mink. But then some stuff was happening with me, and he was being really kind and caring and he was supporting me. It just sort of happened."

And then Qibli died and everything changed.

She felt Silver's cold talon on her shoulder and she instinctively tried to lean into him, her brain telling her it was Winter. Silver

pulled back and she stumbled. "S-sorry, I'm just... not great with affection," he said.

"No, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have even tried." She righted herself and sighed, staring back up at the ceiling. "I don't know what to do, Silver. I feel so helpless now. Peacemaker told me that I've been causing him nothing but stress and anxiety and... what if I've been doing that to my other friends? I mean, I never told them about my depression, but what if they had been worrying about me? What if they think I don't trust them?"

"I don't think it's so much about trust. It's not the easiest thing to talk about, even with friends, I suppose. This is the first time I've ever been semi-open with anyone, and it's kinda terrifying. Did they seem upset?"

She shrugged. They didn't really seem upset with her, but she could tell they wished she told them. She could also feel an overwhelming urge to escape this conversation. "I... think I'm gonna walk back."

"Oh. Well, uh... want me to walk you back?" She could tell he seemed a little upset about it.

"No, I'll be alright."

"Please? Just so I can maybe keep you from spiraling again?"

"What? How'd you know?"

"I heard you start to hyperventilate from around the corner before we crashed into each other." She sighed and looked down at the ground.

"Alright." They started walking back and didn't say a word to each other until they reached the entrance to Turtle's room, where she still heard the light breathing from the sleeping dragons inside. "Thanks," she muttered.

"I'll... see you back at the school?"

Bumblebee put on a fake smile and nodded. "Yeah." She watched Silver walk off before she entered the room. Everyone but Winter

was still asleep.

"Hey," he whispered. "How was the walk?"

Bumblebee sat down beside him without saying a word and buried her head into his shoulder. "Bumblebee?" She still didn't say anything. Understanding, Winter put a wing around him as she began quietly sobbing into his shoulder.

I Ruined His Life

"Oh, not again," Coldsnap grumbled.

"Oh, absolutely again," Sandstone grumbled back, holding a hammered BlackIce up from his side. Coldsnap took his other side and guided him into the hideout.

"Stoooop, I can walk myself," BlackIce whined, pushing the two away. When they let go, BlackIce took one step and immediately fell over.

"Why do you have to act like a dragonet when you're drunk?" Coldsnap growled, picking him up.

"Better like this than how he was all day. He was breaking down crying every ten minutes," Sandstone said, taking his other arm again. When they entered the large cave where the rest of the gang was, they walked BlackIce to the couch, where Landslide got up from. BlackIce flopped face-first onto the couch before flipping over onto his back. "Guess I gotta get going."

"Good seeing you again," Coldsnap said, lightly punching the SandWing's shoulder.

"Yeah, you too. Wish it was under better circumstances, though."

"Wait," Huntsman interjected. "Where's the kid?" At the mention of Peacemaker, BlackIce groaned.

Sandstone sighed. "Peacemaker's dead."

"Good riddance," Snakeroot growled from across the cave. Hearing this, BlackIce started to growl.

"Relax," he heard Huntsman whisper in his ear.

"BlackIce... did you really kill him?" Jet asked softly. No answer.

"BlackIce, he was just a dragonet," Rattlesnake said. "I mean, I know that's usually what we do here, but... that felt too far."

"I didn't kill him," BlackIce grumbled.

"Then... who did?" Huntsman asked.

"WHO CARES!?" Snakeroot shouted. "He got what was coming to him! Don't tell me you guys actually cared for him! Landslide, he stabbed your eye! You have to wear an eyepatch your whole life now!"

"I was mad for a while, but I get it. It was smart thinking, honestly," the MudWing said.

"What? Are- are you serious? You're *praising* him for stabbing you IN YOUR GODDAMN EYE!?"

"You know, I'm really glad my hatred for you over the years is just getting solidified. Makes it even easier to hate you." Sandstone interjected.

"You wanna say that to my face?"

"Well, come on over here, because there's no way I'm willingly approaching you. Bet you get that a lot, yeah?"

Snakeroot threateningly approached the SandWing, his fangs bared. He stopped when he was a snout's length away from him. "How's the whore?"

Sandstone kept a straight face. "She's doing well. We're very happy with our lives."

"Uh-huh. Sure would suck if something happened to them, wouldn't it? Maybe when we're done here, I could pay her a visit. And if you've got any kids, them too."

Still no reaction from Sandstone. "Emptiest threat I've heard in a long time, and I own a bar. I hear empty threats every day."

"You wanna try me?"

"Yeah. Maybe I—" Before Sandstone could finish his sentence, BlackIce pushed him out of the way and punched Snakeroot square in the face. He fell back before quickly getting back up.

"What the hell!? Dick!" He clutched and rubbed his jaw.

"Pack your shit and get out," the hybrid growled.

"What, seriously!? For being the only one who's still committed to what we do!?"

"Get. The *fuck*. Out."

"Why, exactly!?"

"For forcing me to take Peacemaker out by turning invisible because I couldn't trust you. If you hadn't done that, he would still be here! *Alive!"*

"Exactly! He would've been alive! Did you *not* try to kill him several months ago!? I just helped you finish the job!"

"Oh, don't you *fucking* start with that! I messed up! I ruined his life and I know that! I wanted to make things right for him, but I couldn't! He paid for *my* mistakes, and I'll have to live with that for the rest of my goddamn life!"

"Grow the hell up! If Firn didn't kill him, then someone else would have! The whole continent wanted him dead anyway, and—"

"What?" BlackIce cut him off.

"What?"

"How'd you know it was Firn?" Snakeroot opened his mouth to say something, but closed it with a sigh. "You didn't just turn invisible to force us out. You son of a *bitch!"*

"Listen—" BlackIce punched the RainWing even harder, truly knocking him down. He dazedly picked himself back up, but the hybrid pinned him to the wall by his neck with his arm, cutting off his air.

"You have about ten seconds to get the hell out before I rip your tongue out and feed it to you."

He let him go and Snakeroot gasped as he stumbled a few steps forward. As soon as he gained his footing, he turned around and shot venom at BlackIce. It splattered against his shoulder and he roared in pain. Snakeroot was about to lunge, but Sandstone slashed him with his tail along the length of his side. The RainWing collapsed in pain and blood began oozing from the wound. He clutched as much of the wound as he could, but it didn't stop the blood from flowing out.

When BlackIce scraped away the last of the venom on his shoulder, he grabbed the RainWing's neck and pinned him to the ground. He tried clawing at the hybrid, but to no avail. "One. More. Chance," he growled. "I'm giving you one more chance to get the fuck out. One more chance to live. But if not, I have no problems cleaning up whatever mess you make."

Snakeroot growled softly before relenting, letting his arms go limp. BlackIce let his neck go and got off of him. The RainWing stood up, clutching his wound. "Life hasn't been worth living ever since Darkstalker took the love of my life away from me. He made her fight IceWings at Jade Mountain alongside dozens of other NightWings. I tried to convince her not to go with him to the Old Night Kingdom. Of course, at the time, I had no idea she was enchanted to like him. But he's the reason she's dead. He's the reason Glacier's dead, and I know you're not over that."

"Just shut the fuck up... and get the hell out," BlackIce grumbled. Snakeroot turned around and limped out without another word. BlackIce sat back down on the couch, rubbing his eyes.

"Yeesh, he's got a stick up his ass," Jet said.

"Maybe he's not wrong," the hybrid groaned. "Maybe I should've killed Peacemaker when I had the chance."

"I know you don't believe that," Coldsnap said.

"I guess I don't know what I believe anymore."

"I know what I believe," Landslide interjected. "I believe you need to get some sleep."

BlackIce sighed. "Sandstone?"

"Yeah?" The SandWing responded.

"Go be with your family. I don't believe Snakeroot would really go after them, but... just in case."

Sandstone hesitated, but agreed. He placed a talon on BlackIce's non-burnt shoulder. "It really was good seeing you all again. And I'm sorry about everything." He walked off, his tail still stained in Snakeroot's blood.

BlackIce felt his head spinning. Landslide was right. He needed sleep. But he felt like he wouldn't be able to get a good night's sleep for a long time. "Does anyone have a sleep dart?"

Without a response, BlackIce felt something jab him in the arm. He looked and saw a sleep dart sticking out of his arm. He pulled it out and dropped it on the ground.

"Are you alright?" Huntsman asked. BlackIce was going to ask what she meant, but then he felt a single tear rolling down his cheek. He sighed.

"I messed up. I messed everything up. I should've thought of some way to save Peacemaker and Turtle. Maybe if I had offered to give myself to him instead?" Huntsman gently laid him back on the couch as his consciousness was fading. "I messed everything up. I messed up his life and everyone around him. I'm no better than Darkstalker." His voice was starting to break as more tears started rolling down his face.

Huntsman didn't respond. At least, BlackIce couldn't hear a response. Just the gentle caress of her talon on his shoulder. Before his consciousness completely went out, the last words he was able to utter in his sobbing voice was "I miss him."

Sorry that you're stuck with the dirty work

It was difficult to breathe. All Peacemaker could smell was smoke and ash. All he could feel was the pain in his neck from Firn's dart and the feeling of being dragged across what felt like cobblestone. He could hear muffled voices as he was struggling to wake himself up.

He was suddenly thrown rather forcefully into the ground, which woke him up. There was also a sudden slam of something metallic behind him. He opened his eyes as much as he could, but could only see white and black blurred figures in front of him and they all seemed to be... behind some bars.

Am I in prison?

Why would Firn take us to a prison? That seems completely backwards with what he wants.

So does the fact that we're alive right now.

He could feel his senses being overwhelmed by loud yelling. And he was suddenly aware of how everything on his body hurt like hell. He saw four IceWings and three NightWings.

"Hey, he's awake!"

"Finally!"

"Fifty coins, he doesn't last a week!"

"I wanna see him!"

"When can we rip him apart!?"

"Wow, it's hard to breathe here!"

"EVERYONE OUT OF THE WAY!" A voice roared. Everyone went quiet as an IceWing stopped in front of Peacemaker's cell, which he realized was Firn. "Wow, you guys really did a number on him."

"You have no idea how much I had to hold back," a NightWing with a gold ring on both horns growled.

"Okay? Good for you. Want a gold star?" An IceWing with no discernible features growled back.

Peacemaker clutched his neck where Firn shoved the dart. The blood has completely dried. He also noted a lot of other parts of him that were covered in wounds, old and recent. There was so much dry and fresh blood.

As he tried to stand, he felt himself getting dizzy again. Clutching his head, he fell over again, earning a laugh from the dragons watching him.

Don't say anything that'll get us killed.

You're telling me that?

Shut up.

He wasn't in control of his own body again as Darkstalker flexed his talons. When he stood, it took a second for him to right himself before looking at the dragons watching him. "Where am I?"

"You know..." Firn started. "I really had to try not to stab you in the throat when I stuck that dart in you."

"Then why am I alive? If you want me dead so badly, then get it over with," Darkstalker growled.

"He gave us the go-ahead! Let's kill him!" Another NightWing said overenthusiastically, getting ready to open the cell door, which Firn grabbed and pulled shut again. He then back-taloned him.

"No. You'd be getting off way too easy. Killing you would be merciful. I want you to feel even *half* the pain you caused me and everyone here. All the pain you caused the NightWings and

IceWings."

"If you plan to torture me, you'd also be torturing Peacemaker."

Firn barked out a laugh while some of the others snickered. "Who gives a shit about him? He's hardly innocent. He killed Fennec, remember?"

"He was scared and angry! She killed someone he loved!"

"As far as I know, he's just another victim of what you've done! I'm sorry for the kid, but if this is what it takes for you to feel even a *fraction* of you've done to us... then so be it. You're on the old NightWing Island, by the way. This is what's left of the old prison. Have fun getting lung cancer." Firn looked to his left and sighed. "Took you long enough."

A RainWing appeared, clutching his side. "Yeah, I was busy getting my shit kicked in. Guess I'm not with BlackIce anymore."

Can't say I'm surprised that he's here.

Yeah, but why wouldn't BlackIce just kill him?

Probably doesn't have it in him right now.

Snakeroot looked at Darkstalker and growled. "Who's in there right now?" He asked the IceWing.

"Darkstalker."

At the mention of his name, he shot venom at the hybrid. Darkstalker tried to dodge, but it splattered against his thigh. He roared in pain as it burned the scales. He clawed at it, burning his talons in the process. All to the laughter of his audience.

When he finally clawed it all off and the burning subsided, he kept a talon pressed against where he was burned.

"This is Quickthinker," Firn says, pulling a NightWing to the front of the crowd. "She'll be the one taking care of you, making sure you don't die before we're ready."

She gave him a quick nod, but she didn't seem to be as full of hatred as everyone else. She wasn't growling, she didn't look angry, she didn't even look unhappy. If anything, she looked a bit tired.

"And I guess I better start with making sure that doesn't get infected," she said. She opened the cell door and Darkstalker tried to back away. "Relax. I'm the only one here who's not gonna hurt you. Intentionally, anyway."

So, he let her tend to his leg, holding a cool, wet cloth against it. He winced in pain, trying to keep himself from accidentally kicking her away. She reached into a bag tied to her hip and pulled out a bottle. She opened it and put the cloth on top and tipped the bottle upside down, getting whatever was in the bottle on the cloth. She took it off and put it back on the burn. Darkstalker roared in pain. This time he kicked Quickthinker away, making her drop the cloth.

Firn tapped on the metal bar twice, smiling. "This is gonna be fun, right guys?"

"Cheers to that!" The enthusiastic NightWing shouted.

"Have fun cleaning him up. You're really gonna have your work cut out for you," Firn laughed. "Let's get going. We'll be back soon." Quickthinker sighed as the group left the two alone.

"Hold still. The quicker I do this, the quicker it'll end," she said, pressing the cloth to the burn again. This time, he didn't kick, but scraped the floor. When she was done, she put everything back in her bag, sat back and rubbed her temples.

"So... did I take anyone from you?" Darkstalker asked, half sarcastically.

"You took someone from all of us. That's why you're here," she growled. He was taken aback by her sudden anger.

"Who... did I take from you?"

She sighed, curling her tail around her legs. "My girlfriend. We fought together in the Battle of Jade Mountain. She was killed right in front of me."

"I'm sorry."

"Shut up."

"No, I mean... I'm really sorry."

"Great. You're sorry, and because of you, I'm stuck being used by these animals."

"Yeah, I'm also sorry you're stuck with the dirty work," Darkstalker gave a small chuckle. "If they're really gonna torture me all the time, you're really gonna have your work cut out for you."

"That's not what I'm talking about."

Darkstalker frowned.

What does she mean by that?

She said "used" instead of "working for."

Are they keeping her around as a slave then?

Something tells me she's more than just a slave to them.

You ripped her life apart. This is what you've done to countless others.

Darkstalker slowly reached out to her arm, but she smacked him away. "Fuck off with the sympathy. I've allowed them to do this to me, so I've gotta live with it."

"You don't have to live with it. Why haven't you tried running away?"

"I have! They found me and had their way with me! There's nothing I can do! If I try to get help, they'll kill me!"

Seems I ruined hers more than most others.

"I don't really want anything to do with this or with you, but I have no choice," she said, her voice breaking. "So thanks for that, prick." She stood up, opened the cell door and slammed it shut. She locked it and stormed off, leaving the hybrid alone.

Are you happy?

No, of course not.

You're finally getting a good look at what you've done. A clear view of the lives you've destroyed.

I feel like you destroyed Bumblebee's life.

Don't change the subject! You're the reason all of that happened!

How!? I was the one telling you to calm down! You were the one that punched her!

EVERYTHING WAS YOUR FAULT! BLACKICE WOULDN'T HAVE KILLED MOM! FIRN AND FENNEC WOULDN'T HAVE KILLED QIBLI! YOU DROVE ME TO HURT BUMBLEBEE!

None of that was me. Don't you fucking dare throw the blame to me.

How!? How the hell is it not your fault!? Ever since you showed up in my head, my life has been a living hell! It was perfectly normal before you decided to show up!

Darkstalker had nothing else to say. He knew Peacemaker was right. He knew he ruined his life. He sat with his back against the wall, his wings wrapped around himself.

"I'm sorry."

I'm So Tired

Things couldn't be worse for Moon. First, the love of her life was murdered. Then, the dragonet she was being a surrogate mother for was killed. She's had to watch as all of his friends go into a fit of depression for one reason or another. She's been noticing how badly Qibli's death has been affecting Winter, and is constantly worried about him reverting back to how he was before. And one of her best friends was currently in the hospital.

She was staring down at the hospital floor, thinking about everything that had happened in the past week. She clutched her aching head. The minds in the hospital were overwhelming. Even more so than the minds of young dragonets in a wingery. Thoughts of pain, anger, fear, and sadness were engulfing her, and she felt like she was drowning. More than she had felt in years.

Ever since Qibli's death, she hasn't been able to see even the smallestglimpse of the future. Almost as if her seer abilities had stopped working.

The sun was blaring in the room, sunlight reflecting off of Winter's white scales. Bumblebee was fast asleep against him. He had said that she didn't sleep well, so they were all letting her sleep. However, Moon knew why she was actually tired, but knew better than to bring it up.

Kinkajou was pacing the room. She was growing increasingly inpatient waiting for Turtle to wake up. Luckily, the doctors said he'll wake up at any moment.

Auklet was kneeling beside Turtle's bed, resting her head on it. She was holding one of Turtle's talons in hers. All Moon could hear in her head was ways to tell Turtle about Queen Coral's death.

"I'm gonna get some air," she muttered to Winter, and he gently grabbed her arm.

"Are you alright?" He asked.

"Yeah. I just... wanna step outside for a moment." She kissed him and walked out of the room. She made her way to the exit of the hospital, and when she stepped outside, she took in a deep breath.

The sun was directly above, beating down on her and the entirety of Possibility. Dragons of all tribes were wandering around the streets, chatting and selling goods in stands. Even though the amount of loud minds around her was somewhat overwhelming, it wasn't nearly as bad as the minds in the hospital.

She sat down on a nearby bench, letting out a shaky breath. She stared up at the blue, cloudless sky, still trying to process everything that's happened in the last few days.

"Moon?" She jumped when her name was called out. She looked around until she spotted a familiar SilkWing and HiveWing.

"Blue? Cricket?" She stood up and faced them.

"Yeah, it's been awhile." Blue pulled her into a hug, which she happily accepted. His four wings engulfing her felt extremely comforting. But it was rather embarrassing that when he tried to pull away, Moon didn't, seeking more of that comfort. "Um... Moon?"

When she realized what she was doing she pulled away. "S-sorry." She gave Cricket a big hug too. "What are you doing in Possibility?"

"Looking for Bumblebee. She had sent us a letter saying that she would come see us on her break, but she never showed up, so we were worried. Sundew and Willow are looking in the Rain Kingdom and Luna and Swordtail are heading to Jade Mountain. Do you know where she is?"

"Yeah, she's in the hospital, but—"

"WHAT!? Is she okay!? What happened!? Why didn't anyone tell us!?" Cricket freaked out.

"Cricket!" She yelled, grabbing her arm. "She's okay. She's not hurt.

Remember Turtle? He was almost killed recently, so we're here to see him."

"Oh, thank goodness. I-I mean for her. Is Turtle okay now?"

"Still hasn't woken up because they gave him a lot of sedatives. He should at any time now." She looked down at her talons, Qibli's earring shining in the sunlight.

"Hey, matching with Qibli?" Blue asked. Moon turned away, starting to feel tears welling up. She flinched slightly when she felt Blue gently put a talon on her shoulder. "Are you alright?" He asked gently.

It was taking everything Moon had to not break down and start sobbing for the twentieth time in the last twenty-four hours. "Qibli's dead," she choked out.

"Oh, Moon." He pulled her into another hug. One she leaned into hard. "I'm so sorry. What happened, if you don't mind me asking?"

She explained everything. From the moment Darkstalker first appeared in Peacemaker's head to Firn killing him. The only parts she left out were Bumblebee's depression, Peacemaker hurting her and telling her to kill herself. She felt that Bumblebee should talk about that when she's ready. All with Blue and Cricket sitting there quietly, listening.

"Wasn't Foeslayer called Hope?" Cricket asked. "I mean, that one time Blue and I met her all those years ago, she went by Hope."

"It didn't stick very well. Those who were close to her still called her 'Foeslayer,' but everyone else knew her as Hope." Moon explained.

"Even before Darkstalker was in his head, Peacemaker called her 'Foeslayer,' right?"

"Yeah, I believe so."

"Alright... so all he had to do was pick up a history scroll and he probably would've put two and two together." Moon opened her mouth, but closed it, unable to find her words.

"And why would BlackIce do that to the poor kid?"

"He regrets it. I've seen it in his head. He's constantly beating himself up over it." They stood in silence for a moment until Moon spoke again. "You guys wanna see Bumblebee?"

"Yes, please," they both said.

They followed her into the hospital, and she led them to Turtle's room. She cracked the door open to see everything was the same as she had left it. Kinkajou was still pacing, Auklet still had her head rested on the bed, Bumblebee was still asleep against Winter, and Turtle was still unconscious.

"Just wait out here a moment," she told Blue and Cricket. "I don't want her to freak out when she wakes up." They both nodded, so Moon entered and closed the door behind her.

"Hey, that didn't take long," Winter whispered. "You doing okay?"

"Yeah. Just... Blue and Cricket are outside. I told them to wait in the hall. I wanted to wake Bumblebee up first," Moon said. She crouched down and shook the HiveWing's leg. Her eyes fluttered open

"Hm? What?"

"Hey, sweetie. Your parents flew here to come see you. Would you like to see them?" Bumblebee rubbed her eyes and looked at Moon in disbelief.

"Here? They flew here to see me? Why?"

"You told them you'd come see them. When you didn't show up, it worried them."

She's not gonna want to see us, she heard Blue's mind going from the other side of the door.

"I-I guess. Where are they?"

"Right outside the door." Bumblebee rubbed her eyes again, sighing.

"If you don't want to, I can just—"

"No. No, it's fine. I just... didn't expect this. How much... have you told them?"

"Everything except the stuff about you. I'll leave that up to you, okay?" The HiveWing nodded. Moon squeezed her knee before getting back up and going to the door. She opened it and Cricket and Blue walked in and closed the door behind them.

"Hey," Bumblebee muttered.

"Hey, sweetie," Cricket said. Bumblebee got up and hugged her mom. "We've all missed you. And even though Sundew won't admit it, she really misses you too."

"Yeah. I've missed you guys too. There's just been a lot going on. I'm sorry I couldn't—"

"You don't need to apologize," Blue said. "Moon told us about what happened. We completely get it."

Moon saw images of Coral flashing through Auklet's head at seeing Cricket and Blue's affection. She's been extremely numb since they arrived at the hospital. She's been catching her staring off into space a lot more and the image of Coral's bloody body keeps appearing in her mind.

For once, she wasn't seeing Coral's body, but was seeing her loving side when Auklet was younger.

I have Cliff now. I don't need Mother. She hurt him. But she was family. Just as much as Cliff is to me now. But... Ruby has been more motherly to me than she's been in the last couple years.

Moon sighed, sitting where Bumblebee was next to Winter. "Are you alright?" He whispered.

"I'll tell you later," Moon whispered back.

"I-I can't leave, mom," Bumblebee said. "There's been so much happening and I don't want to leave my friends."

"Sweetie, it's okay. We get it. What if we stayed instead?" Cricket suggested.

"Y-you don't have to do that."

"It's not a big deal," Blue reassured. "Luna and Sundew would understand."

"But... what if something happens to you?"

"What would happen to us?" Cricket asked.

"I can think of a few things." A voice muttered. They all turned to the bed to see Turtle opening his eyes.

"TURTLE!" Kinkajou suddenly shouted. She jumped on him, hugging him violently.

"OW! Kinkajou, be careful." Despite his pain, he wrapped his wings around the RainWing. Turtle opened his mouth to speak again, but Kinkajou locked her lips with his. The SeaWing's eyes widened and Moon couldn't help but smile slightly.

Kinkajou pulled back and looked him in the eyes, her scales now completely pink. "I thought I lost you," she said, her eyes watering. She nuzzled her head in his neck, which Turtle happily accepted.

He turned to look at Auklet and his faint smile disappeared. "Auklet, I... I'm so sorry. I shouldn't have left you there. It's just... Qibli was my best friend, you know?"

"No, it's okay. I get it," she said. "There was a lot going on."

"And Moon... I'm so sorry. About Qibli and Peacemaker. I-I tried to save him, but there was nothing I could do. He... threatened Kinkajou. He said he'd hurt her if I didn't lead him to the shell that was making me practically invincible. He destroyed it and beat the shit out of me, and used me to get Peacemaker. He forced BlackIce to give him up. I'm really sorry."

"Turtle, stop," Moon said, getting up and taking his talon in hers. "It's not your fault at all. Don't do that to yourself."

"Turtle, Tsunami killed Mother," Auklet said.

"Seriously?"

"Yeah. I've never seen her like that before. But she's queen now. I hear she's been doing pretty well for her first week."

Turtle looked down at Kinkajou, whose head was resting on his chest, looking up at him. "Are you doing alright Auklet?"

"I'm okay," she muttered.

She's definitely lying, but I can't really tell how she's actually doing.

The door suddenly opened and a familiar hybrid walked in. "Sunny? What are you doing here?" Winter asked.

"I was actually looking for Moon. I asked around for you. I came here to let you know that... we're not gonna be opening the school back up this year," she explained sadly.

"What? Why?" Bumblebee asked.

"The SeaWings attacked the SkyWings. We don't want them to all be in a place where they don't feel safe. And we have to figure out the whole situation with Tsunami. We'll be opening back up next year. I'm really sorry."

A silence fell over the room. At least, it did for everyone except Moon. Bumblebee's mind was panicking. Auklet seemed to notice too. "Excuse me, can I talk to Bumblebee privately?" She asked Blue and Cricket.

"Yeah, I guess," Blue said. She grabbed Bumblebee's arm and dragged her out of the room. "I'm gonna go find the other four and bring them here." He kissed Cricket and left the room.

"Is... Bumblebee okay?" The HiveWing asked.

"She's just been taking Peacemaker's death really hard," Moon said.

There's more she isn't telling us. I'm sure of it.

The NightWing sighed. "Let Bumblebee explain on her own. Don't force her. She's been through a lot and she may not want to talk about it. But it's also not my place." She looked out the window and saw Blue flying off.

"We'll be prioritizing accepting returning students next year, but we understand if some don't come back," Sunny explained.

A conversation started around the room, but Moon wasn't listening. She was tuning everything out, still staring out the window at the dragons wandering around the city.

I'm so tired...

Epilogue kind of

Auklet grabbed Bumblebee's arm and dragged her out of the room. A minute later, Blue came out, kissed Bumblebee, and walked off, looking for the exit.

"Bumblebee, are you alright?" The SeaWing asked.

"I-I can't do this! I can't go back to Pantala! I don't wanna be away from you guys!" The HiveWing cried.

"Hey, relax. Your mom said you guys could stay here."

"But that was before we found out the school was closing!"

"She didn't suggest that because of the school. She did it because she didn't want you to be away from us. Because she loves and cares about you." She pressed her forehead against hers. "We all love and care about you."

Bumblebee closed the distance between them and hugged her. Auklet winced at the pressure against her chest, but didn't say anything or push her away, so as to not make her feel any worse.

"I love you guys too. I'm just worried they might change their minds." She nuzzled into Auklet's collarbone. The SeaWing gently stroked the back of her neck.

"I guarantee you they won't. I can talk to Queen Ruby about finding you guys a place to live that's close by. That way, we can see each other any time we want. And you can see Gale at any time too. And if she can't, I'm sure Queen Thorn or Queen Glory would be happy to help." Instead of saying anything, Bumblebee hugged her tighter, which told Auklet that she just wanted to be held right now.

So she did. For a while, they stood there, silently holding each other. That is, until Bumblebee began quietly sobbing. "I'm sorry

that I'm like this," she whimpered.

"You have nothing to apologize for," the SeaWing said softly as the door swung open again. This time, Sunny was leaving.

"Oh!" She quickly shut the door when she saw them. "Are you alright sweetheart?" Bumblebee didn't respond.

"It's been a lot, Sunny. I mean, with everything that's happened with Qibli and Peacemaker. Now the school's closing. We can't really catch a break," Auklet explained.

"I know, and I'm so sorry," the hybrid said. "If there's anything any of us can do, please let us know. Me, Clay, Starflight, Fatespeaker, and even Webs would always be happy to help. Well, maybe Webs wouldn't always be happy. But he'll help. And Bumblebee, I can talk with Glory about finding someplace for your family to live in the Rainforest." Still no response.

"Sorry, I think we just need to be alone for a bit," the SeaWing said, continuing to gently stroke the back of Bumblebee's neck.

"Of course. One of us will let you know when the school is opening back up." Sunny walked off and left the two alone again.

Auklet sighed when they fell into more silence between them. They were silent until Bumblebee suddenly pulled away. "I'm ready to go back in," she said softly, wiping some tears away. Auklet gently wiped a stray tear from the HiveWing's cheek. "I love you Auklet."

"I love you too."

Wow. Two chapters at once. This is kind of an epilogue (as the title implies) because there's gonna be a time skip after this, and I'm gonna be taking a break to write something I've been wanting to write for a little over a year now. So I'm gonna do that. This is not ending yet. I promise. And I want to thank you all for 10k reads. Do I think it deserves that much? No. Not at all. Am I happy about it? Yes. Very much so. I truly do appreciate it. So be ready for a new story about a certain character you guys probably know. Weeeeeeeeeee

Whatever You Wanna Tell Yourself

Warning: they mention scary sex stuff so be careful

8 MONTHS LATER

"Wake up, daddy!" Tornado said excitedly, bouncing on Cliff's stomach, who was still laying in bed. "Get up!"

"Hon, leave your father alone. He needs his sleep," Auklet said, grabbing Tornado and picking her up and setting her on the floor.

"Too late. I'm up now," Cliff groaned, forcing himself to sit up. He rubbed his eyes. "What time is it?"

"Noon," Auklet said, setting Tornado back down.

"Dammit. I'm sorry, I should've-"

"Don't worry about it. Bumblebee's running late anyway." She leaned down and kissed Cliff, who kissed her back. They held it longer than they initially intended.

"Yuck!" Tornado exclaimed, covering her eyes.

Auklet chuckled in the kiss, breaking it off. "You know, I'm allowed to kiss my boyfriend as much as I like."

"I've heard what happens when you kiss for too long! It's icky!"

"Oh! Um... you heard...?"

"I know what you were doing. When I heard it, I ran to grandma and she explained it to me. It's gross!"

Cliff and Auklet shared a look. "Sorry you had to hear that..." Cliff's face was even redder than usual. "I'm gonna have to talk to mom..."

the SkyWing sighed.

~ ~ ~

"You explained sex to my eight month old daughter!? Seriously!?" Cliff asked his mother, both upset at her and mildly relieved that he didn't have to explain it himself.

"What do you want from me? She was scared that you were hurting Auklet so she came to me and I had to explain what was happening. Now she's too scared to go near your room at night," Ruby explained.

Cliff groaned. "We don't do it every night! Maybe like... once every other— wait, why am I explaining this to you!? I just... wished we could've explained it when she was... *older*? Like... old enough to grasp the concept of it without freaking out?"

"I didn't need to know that. But trust me when I say you shouldn't ever lie to your kid. If they ask you a question, you answer it honestly. They always deserve the truth."

"I wouldn't have lied if she asked me! I was... just thinking sitting her down when she was old enough and giving her *the talk* would've been the best way," he said, rubbing the back of his neck.

"Well, it seemed preferable to saying, 'yes, sweetie. Your father is beating your mother.'"

Cliff groaned again and rubbed his temples. "Whatever. I just hope she wasn't *too* traumatized."

"Well, maybe be quieter next time."

"We're never... *that* loud."

"Uh-huh, whatever you wanna tell yourself. Anyways, I gotta get going. Queen Ciel is meeting Queen Moorhen for the first time later today, and she's really scared, so I gotta get going. Bumblebee's gonna be here soon, right? I can take Tornado if you'd like so you three can have whatever fun you're gonna have. I also hear she's wanted to meet Moorhen."

"Yeah, that'd be great. Tell Ciel I said 'hi.'" Ruby hugged Cliff before heading off, leaving the SkyWing even more embarrassed than before.

Bumblebee showed up about an hour after Ruby and Tornado left, excitedly hugging Cliff and Auklet. "I've missed you guys! Six whole months without seeing you! Where's Tornado?"
"With my mother. She wanted to meet Queen Moorhen, so it's just us three," Cliff explained.

~ ~ ~

"I still have a really hard time believing Jet is your father. I mean, have you met him? You two aren't alike at all!" Bumblebee said, laughing.

"We look kinda similar. I went to the hideout just a couple weeks ago to really meet him. We got the same snout and the same eyes apparently. When you really start getting into a conversation with him, he mellows out, and he's really nice. I can see why my mother liked him," Cliff said. He started looking down at the ground, remembering the hideout.

"Hey, you alright?" Auklet asked, gently nudging his shoulder.

"Yeah, just... I guess I didn't tell you how depressing the hideout was. I mean, everyone was just kinda moping. And when I was talking to Jet, BlackIce eventually came out. He froze when he saw me, and I don't think I've ever seen a dragon look so beaten down. I don't know, his tired face just hasn't been able to leave my head." Auklet squeezed his shoulder affectionately.

"Speaking of that... have you guys seen Mink lately?" Bumblebee asked.

"Yeah, we saw her last month. I don't think she smiled even once." Auklet explained, leaning against Cliff and resting her head on his shoulder.

"And exhausted. Like she hadn't slept in days," Cliff added. "And she was... really touchy. Like... all she wanted to do was hug us and

lean against us, which was mostly fine, but it was a bit much after a while."

"I wanna go see her, but that's such a long flight. And I don't do well in the cold. The savanna on Pantala is relatively warm most of the time. It never snows. So... it's not really a journey I'm willing to make on my own."

Cliff and Auklet shared a glance. "Well... what if we all went? The four of us haven't all been together in a long time, right?" The SeaWing suggested.

Bumblebee lit up. "Really? You'd be willing to fly there with me?"

"Absolutely. We would just need to get my mother to watch over Tornado for the next few days and we can go," Cliff said. "I'll go talk to her and then we can get going."

"Yes! Moons, I've missed her!"

Cliff found his mother talking to Ciel and Moorhen and told her what the trio was going to do. She seemed happy to look after Tornado. He hugged his daughter and his mother, and gave a small bow to the queens, and met up with Auklet and Bumblebee again to start flying off.

Hi! I'm back! So, if it wasn't obvious, I took a break from this for a while because of mental health reasons that I'm sure you've heard a million times. This is a short chapter, but there will be another one tomorrow and the next day, and they're both much longer. I am working on another fic, but that's slowed down a LOT so I'm not gonna worry about it right now. Thanks for reading!

I Don't Want Her to Turn Into Me

"He's not in the Diamond Spray Delta. We really need a SeaWing here. I'm tired of being the one who goes into water. The Sea Kingdom was hell," Landslide muttered. "That's the last place on the map, BlackIce."

BlackIce was leaning over a table with a map of Pyrrhia covered in markings, and with every named location crossed out.

"Then... he must be on Pantala. Maybe even the NightWing island," the hybrid groaned, rubbing his eyes.

"Or he's dead," Rattlesnake said, covered in mud.

"BlackIce, we need to rest!" Coldsnap called out. "We've searched the entire continent in the span of eight months! Jet passed out from exhaustion!" He pointed at the SkyWing, who was lying face-down on the couch.

"I'm fine," Jet said, however muffled by the couch. "I just need to—" he mumbled gibberish into the cushion.

BlackIce sighed and turned to look at the rock wall behind him. Out of anger he punched it hard enough to make his knuckle bleed. He shook his talon and punched the wall again with his other one. And then again. And again. And again. He alternated his fists with each punch, staining the wall in his own blood until his arms grew tired. He looked at his bloody knuckles and then at the group staring at him. "I'm... gonna get a drink."

~ ~ ~

"Again!? That's the eighth time this week... and we're only three days in!" Sandstorm said exasperatedly as BlackIce entered his tavern. He sat on a stool in front of the bar and rubbed his head.

"It's been a... really shitty day," the hybrid grumbled.

"Yeah? What else is new? Look, I love feeding into your crippling alcohol addiction relapse as much as the next guy, but at some point, you gotta sit down and think about the damage you've done to your poor liver." Even as he said this, Sandstone poured him a shot of whiskey.

"We crossed out the entire map, Sandstone. If he's alive... he's not on Pyrrhia." He took the shot and rubbed his head again.

"I know you're not gonna wanna hear this, but—"
"You're right. I don't wanna hear it. I hear it from the others constantly."

"Well, then that should be a sign." He looked to BlackIce's right. "Hey Moon."

The hybrid looked to his right and saw the young NightWing sitting beside him. She gave him a side-eye, but didn't look at him. "Hey Sandstone. Just... gimme something strong," she said with a sigh.

They sat there in silence for a moment with Moon only occasionally giving BlackIce a side glance. The only sounds around them were the chattering of other bar patrons, the clinking of mugs, the squeaking of stools, and the occasional hiccup of a drunk dragon.

"What are you doing here?" BlackIce asked, rhythmically tapping his claw on the bar as a lot of anxiety coursed through him.

"Drinking," she said, still not looking at him. Sandstone slid a full shot glass to her.

"Yeah, but... why?"

"Same reason as you. I've decided that life is a little too much to handle right now." She took the shot and flinched slightly at the taste and the burn.

"Fair enough." The hybrid circled a claw awkwardly inside his empty shot glass. "H-how's Winter?"

"Don't know. Don't get to see him as often as I'd like. Being one of the founders of one of the most beloved cities on the continent keeps you really busy. But any time I see him, he's always exhausted," she explained, tapping the counter to ask Sandstone to pour her another shot.

"Sounds like he's overworked."

"Yeah, I told him that, but he refuses to do anything about it. Anyway, I've been staying with Turtle a lot. He's a good friend. Never badgers me about being drunk. He lets me sleep it off and cleans up after my hangovers, which I tell him not to do, but he insists."

She just kept rambling about nothing in particular and taking shots, until BlackIce had enough and took her shot glass away from her.

"Gimme..." Moon mumbled, trying to grab the glass back. She was clearly very drunk now, stumbling over herself.

"Nope, you're done," BlackIce said, handing the glass to Sandstone. "I'm gonna take you to Turtle's. Sandstone, any idea where he lives?"

"Yeah, he has a place here in Possibility. You'd think he'd want to live closer to the water, being a SeaWing and all."

"Convenient," BlackIce muttered to himself. "It's a big city. Where specifically?"

"How the fuck should I know? You think I go around asking for dragons' addresses?"

"Do you really want me to answer that?" Sandstone looked at the hybrid blankly before silently turning to help a SeaWing. "Alright Moon, I'm gonna need you to show me where Turtle lives."

"Noooooo, I'm fiiiiiine. But not *hic* as fine as you..." That was all BlackIce needed to hear to find out what kind of drunk Moon was.

"Moon, I'm thirty years older than you and you're drunk." She kept rubbing her claws up and down his arms.

"Experience..."

"Moon, *stop*." He removed her claws from his arms. He knew telling her to stop wouldn't do anything. She was drunk out of her mind and not thinking clearly.

"Yeah, sorry about her," Sandstone called out. "She's always like this when she's drunk. She rambles for a while and then starts acting like this." BlackIce tossed the SandWing a few gold coins.

The hybrid sighed and grabbed Moon's wrist to drag her out of the bar. When they got out, he grabbed her shoulders, steadying her. "Where exactly does Turtle live?"

"In Possibility." Moon giggled. BlackIce groaned and rubbed his eyes.

"Moon, please. I'm really not in the mood for this right now. Where does he live?"

"Somewhere around herrrrrrre~" she sang, looking around. BlackIce leaned against the wall of the tavern and looked up at the cloudless sky. "There he iiiiiiissss!"

BlackIce looked back down at Moon, and then where she was looking. The green SeaWing was approaching her, kneeling slightly to catch her as she stumbled into him.

"Turtyyyyyy~"

Turtle sighed before locking eyes with BlackIce. "Hope she didn't give you too much trouble," he said.

"Yeah, uh... can we talk? I'll help you walk her back to your place," BlackIce offered. Turtle nodded and the three started walking through the city. Well, Turtle and BlackIce were walking. Moon was stumbling over herself and going back and forth between leaning heavily against either of them. Mostly against Turtle as he was keeping a wing around her.

"Y-y'know, I've always thought *hic* y-you were pretty h-h-hot, Turty," Moon slurred, trying to kiss his cheek, but the SeaWing

pushed her head away as if he's done this a hundred times before.

They finally reached Turtle's home, which BlackIce entered awkwardly. It had been a while since he had been in an actual house. "I'll go lay her down and then we can talk," Turtle said. He walked her to a bed in a separate room. He moved the blankets and sat her down on the edge of the bed. He helped her get her legs up and then covered her with the blankets.

As he was about to walk away, Moon grabbed his arm. "Stay with me..." she whimpered slightly.

"In a bit, okay? I'm gonna go chat with BlackIce and then I'll come back." He pulled out of her grasp and left the room, closing the door. He turned to face the hybrid. "So... what's up?"

"How- how long has this been going on for?" The hybrid asked, sitting in a chair. Turtle sat in one beside him.

"Nearly every day for the past four months. As you've seen, she's not the easiest when she's drunk. She's constantly trying to kiss me or even drag me into bed with her." Turtle rubbed his eyes.

"Yeah, she tried when we were leaving the tavern."

"Well, try not to bring it up when she's sober. She always feels extremely guilty afterwards. Want some water?" The SeaWing asked, standing up.

"Um... sure, thanks. What does Winter think about all of this?"

Turtle pulled out two glasses and held them under a keg. "I... don't know. I haven't spoken to him about this and I have no clue if Moon has or not. She doesn't really talk about him much. Except when she's drunk and she tells me things about him that I've never wanted to know, and wish I didn't know." He hands a full glass to BlackIce and sits back down.

"Look, I think it's really nice of you to be doing this, but it's clearly taking a big toll on you. You shouldn't have to deal with this," BlackIce said, taking a sip of the water.

"Yeah, but... she's my friend. I care about her. I want her to feel like she has a safe place to go to when she's drunk or depressed since... she's clearly not really finding that with Winter." Turtle fidgeted with the edge of his water glass. "I just... worry that she might..." he didn't finish his sentence, but BlackIce knew what he meant.

"Do you really think she would?" The SeaWing just looked down at his glass. "Look... she clearly needs help right now. I can't help but feel like letting her stay here is... enabling her? She needs help. *Real* help. When she's awake and not hungover, we could talk her into going to therapy or something."

"I've tried. She always says it's too expensive, so she doesn't bother."

"Then I'll pay for it. She won't have any excuses. I don't want her to turn into me. She's too young to be drinking herself to death." They sat in silence for a moment. BlackIce almost wanted to go back to the tavern, get drunk, and not think about this, but he felt it was more important to be here for when Moon woke up.

"You know, she still hates you. She drunkenly curses you out sometimes. Hell, she even does it while sober sometimes."

"Yeah, and she has a right to." He finished his glass and set it on a wooden table beside his chair with a sigh. "I know there's nothing I can do to make it right, but I wanna do something to help. Anything."

Turtle stared at him for a few seconds before setting his glass on the wooden table as well. "I don't have any more spare beds, but you're welcome to sleep on the couch."

Do You Really Wanna Risk That?

"Eat. Don't want you to go belly-up just yet," an IceWing said, tossing a dead albatross to Peacemaker. He looked at the dead bird and wanted to throw up.

He's been living off of dead, almost rotting animals for eight months straight, and it makes him feel sick every time he bites into one. But he's starving, so he needs to eat.

"Firn was pretty rough on you today, huh," the IceWing said as Peacemaker begrudgingly took a bite out of the albatross' breast. "Sorry kiddo."

They were always a bit nicer to Peacemaker than to Darkstalker, but they still never held back physically. He had scratches, burns, and scars all over his body. He was malnourished, his ribs and cheekbones very prominent. They declawed him to prevent him from fighting back. With all the hits to the head he's endured, it's immensely difficult for him to speak. He stutters and has a lot of trouble finding words. His wings were completely covered in soot, ash, and mud, completely covering the rainbow pattern.

"Polar, Firn told me to clean him up a bit," Quickthinker's voice called out.

"Thank the moons, my legs are killing me," the IceWing said, walking off. Quickthinker opened the cell, walked in, and closed the door. She took the albatross away from Peacemaker and reached into a bag buckled around her chest.

"Here." She pulled out a mango, which Peacemaker took immediately and began wolfing it down. "Whoa, slow down. You could go into shock."

The hybrid didn't care. He finished eating the mango in a matter of

seconds and sighed contentedly. "Th-th-thank you," he muttered. The NightWing also pulled out some other medical supplies from her bag to clean him. She opened a bottle of liquid, put a rag on top of the opening, and turned it upside down. She then pressed the wet spot on the towel against an open wound on his arm, making him wince.

"Moons, they did a lot to you this time. It's a wonder you haven't gotten any infections yet." As much as the wound was burning, it wasn't anything Peacemaker hadn't been through a hundred times now. "Went to check on your friends."

"H-how are they?"

"Mink is miserable. Cliff and Auklet are living together. Bumblebee is living with her parents in the Rain Kingdom. Besides Mink, they all seem to be doing well."

"E-even B-B-Bu—"

"Yes, Bumblebee seems to be doing okay." Peacemaker sighed in relief. She's been one of the only things on his mind in the eight months he's been stuck on the island. The guilt of what he did has been eating him up more than anything Firn could do to him. "So, have you given any thought about how you wanna do this?"

Peacemaker gave a "sort of" type of talon motion. "W-w-when they're a-all... g-gone... I-I r-run."

"Last time you tried that, you got caught, and they waterboarded you. There's no way for you to know when they're all gone. They take me with them when they go out partying, and it's always spontaneous, so I can't exactly tell you when you're clear. Plus you're not in any condition to run. You struggle to stand on your own."

"I-it's all I can... d-do," Peacemaker stuttered, trying to push himself up. With how little energy his body had, his legs were shaking and he stumbled a bit. He held himself up as long as he could until he collapsed into Quickthinker, who caught him.

"Adrenaline can only get you so far," she said. "They also threatened to kill your friends if you tried again. Do you really wanna risk that?"

"W-what?"

"Oh, they never told you? Yeah, after last time, Firn decided that if you tried escaping again, they'd kill your friends."

"Th-then what c-can I do!?"

"Hey, relax. Have you been able to get that black, venomous fire working again?" Peacemaker shook his head and looked down at his clawless talons. He just felt useless. He couldn't fight back. He couldn't kill himself. He couldn't escape. All he can do is just sit and wait until they've had enough and finally kill him. Either that, or BlackIce comes to save him, which didn't seem likely, given how it's been eight months without any sign of him looking.

Quickthinker finished cleaning his wounds and started packing her supplies back up. "If I asked you to... w-would you kill me?" The hybrid asked, making the NightWing freeze.

"Probably not. They'd kill me if I did that." She stood up to walk away, but Peacemaker grabbed her arm.

"I... I can't d-do this m-much longer, Q-Quickthinker. I-I can't. If I d-don't succeed n-next time I try t-to g-get out... I'm killing myself the first chance I get."

"I... really hope it doesn't come to that." She pulled her arm away, and opened the cell door to leave, but stopped. "I'm really sorry kid." She walked off without another word.

Peacemaker sat in silent darkness for a moment before sighing.

You there?

Yeah. Can't really believe you got away with that.

Only benefit to not having claws is that it's pretty easy to pickpocket now.

He held up a sharp blade that he took from Quickthinker's bag.

I still wonder why she carries this around with her.

Could be personal protection. Who knows what the guys do to her.

Well, she hasn't killed any of them, so nothing too bad yet, I suppose.

He tested the blade by poking his finger, drawing blood.

It's been sharpened pretty recently.

So… what's the plan?

We wait for the right moment. Preferably when there aren't many of them guarding me. I run, and cut through anyone who tries to get in my way.

Best plan we got, but what will you do if Firn catches you? He's the only one you've never been able to slip away from before. He's a lot stronger than he looks.

I'll have to try and kill him. Maybe my vire will kick in when I need it to.

Your… what?

Vire. You know… venom and fire? Vire?

Silence.

Screw you.

I hope someone stops you and kills us so I never have to hear you say that again.

Buzzkill. What would you rather call it?

I don't know, anything else? That name sucks.

'Venomous fire' is a mouthful.

He heard claws scraping against stone, so he hid the blade in a pile of rocks in the corner of his cell, and laid back down. The approaching dragon came into view and it was Snakeroot, looking neutral.

"C-can I h-help you?" The hybrid asked.

Not saying anything, the RainWing shot a drop of venom at Peacemaker's shoulder. He hissed in pain, but didn't dare touch it. He knew it was best to let it settle before he scraped it off, coming off of all the experience he's had with this.

Looking pleased with himself, Snakeroot walked off. Peacemaker huffed and waited for the burning to stop, taking deep breaths and coughing them out.

What a dick.

When the sizzling finally ceased, he scraped the venom off.

It's probably a bad sign when you've gotten used to RainWing venom.

It's a good thing when it's something that happens constantly.

So... what are you gonna do about your friends if you get out?

What do you mean?

Quickthinker said they're threatening your friends. Got any idea on how you're gonna help them?

Look in my head and figure it out.

So, no plan? Not even gonna think about it right now?

One thing at a time.

Oh. Okay, sure. The first place you're going is BlackIce's hideout, which makes sense. But what about Moon? Or Mink? Or Bumblebee? What about them?

BlackIce can just send one of his guys to get them. I'm not gonna worry about them right now. It seems like the guys are done with me for today, so I wanna get some sleep before they decide to torture me some more.

That's... fair.

He curled up in a ball and rested his head on his arm, draping a wing over his head.

You know, we could just use the dagger to kill ourselves. We don't need to risk getting your friends killed.

I guess. I don't really wanna think about that right now.

I know you don't wanna, but you gotta think about all the angles here.

Peacemaker sighed, coughing again.

Let's discuss this when I wake up.

Fair enough. G'night Peacemaker.

Uh-huh.

You Don't Need To Get Back To Anything

CW: Someone says a homophobic slur. No, it's not played off as a joke. It's said with hatred. Also I'm bisexual, so I'm technically allowed to say it.

The Ice Kingdom was the coldest place Bumblebee had ever been. Cricket had told her that she's been there before, which she had vague memories of, but she didn't remember just how cold it was.

She landed in the middle of the busy streets of the kingdom, Cliff and Auklet landing right after her. Most dragons from other tribes were wearing cloaks or scarves to protect themselves from the cold (although she wasn't sure how much help the scarves were).

"How are there dragons from other tribes living here?" Bumblebee said, wrapping her wings around herself, although her insect-like wings don't cover her nearly as well as another tribe's would.

"You get used to it," Cliff said, putting a wing around her. "We were the same way last time we were here." Despite his words, Bumblebee could feel him shivering slightly.

"Speak for yourself," Auklet said. "This is worse than I remembered."

Cliff put his other wing around her and held both of them close. "Baby."

"Is that a pet name or are you calling me a wuss?"

"Both."

They walked through an area where there was a lot of housing. The houses all looked super fancy. Some of them looked to be entirely made of ice, which seemed really inconvenient.

"What's it like living in a palace?" Bumblebee asked, hugging Cliff as

close as she could, seeking his body warmth.

"It's nice, but I'm so much happier living in a normal home. It's not too much of anything anymore. We get actual privacy now. No one is constantly knocking on our door when we're relaxing or sleeping or... anything else." He cut himself off when Auklet flicked him.

"We couldn't be happier," she finished for him.

"Yeah, I bet. I'm happy for you two." She pressed into Cliff a bit harder. She missed this. She missed being with her friends. Hugging them, cuddling with them, their fun conversations, and...

Her mind drifted to Peacemaker. Words couldn't describe how much she missed him. She missed how much he would make her laugh, how he would comfort her when she was feeling depressed, his handsome face, and... everything about him.

She knew she should be upset with him, but now that he's gone, she couldn't be upset with him. After everything he went through, he deserved to be forgiven... right?

She knew Auklet would disagree. Hell, most dragons would disagree with her, and she couldn't blame them. He hurt her. Told her to kill herself. But Qibli had just been killed. He was traumatized from killing Fennec. He was worried about them getting involved. And she actively went against what he asked of her. That was her fault.

"Bumblebee? You alright?" Cliff asked. She didn't even realize he was looking at her. She also didn't even realize she had started crying.

"Y-yeah. I'm just... thinking about—"

She was cut off when they heard a loud crash to their left. A familiar IceWing was thrown through the window of their home and was struggling to pick himself up off the ground.

"I don't want a faggot like you living in my house!" A voice called from the house. Bumblebee saw an older IceWing looking at Silver from the broken window. "Straighten yourself out, or don't bother

coming back!"

"Silver?" Auklet asked, astonished. The IceWing jumped at her voice and scrambled to get up when he saw the three of them. His nose and arm were bleeding profusely.

"A-are you okay? What was that?" Bumblebee asked.

"Nothing! I'm fine!" He shook himself off and tried to limp away from them, but Bumblebee untangled herself from Cliff and ran to the IceWing's side. "I said I was fine!"

"You don't look fine. You're bleeding, and... you look like you need a friend." She gave him a friendly smile, which he didn't reciprocate.

"What are you guys even doing here? Trying to freeze to death?" Silver asked, clutching his bleeding arm.

"We're here to see Mink," Cliff said. "You know where we might find her?"

"Um... I'd assume the palace? She doesn't really come out here much anymore."

"Hey, you guys go on ahead," Bumblebee said to Cliff and Auklet. "I'll meet you there. I just wanna talk to Silver for a bit."

"Are you sure? I mean, we can talk to him too," Auklet said.

"I would just really like some privacy with him. Please? It won't take long."

Auklet and Cliff shared a glance at each other, before nodding and walking off to the palace, leaving Bumblebee and Silver. The IceWing was gonna speak when the HiveWing suddenly threw her wings around him in a hug. He didn't hug her back, and instead pushed her off. He didn't look mad. Just uncomfortable.

"You look like you're doing better," he mumbled.

"Yeah, it... comes and it goes." She looked at his bleeding arm,

concerned. "You want me to walk you to a doctor?"

"No, it's fine. It's... not my first time getting thrown through a window." He clutched his arm, putting pressure on the wound.

"Not your first time? Seriously?" The HiveWing asked, flabbergasted.

"It's... my dad's go-to when he's mad. Whatever, it doesn't matter."

Sensing he didn't want to talk about that anymore, Bumblebee changed subjects fast. "So... school's starting up again in a couple weeks. Are you gonna be there?"

"I don't know. It's not really much different for me there as it is here. I don't exactly have any friends."

"What about those assholes you used to hang out with when we met each other for the first time in the library?"

"You kinda answered your own question. They were assholes. They treated me like shit just because I wasn't... like them."

"Silver, you can just say you're gay. It's fine."

"Bi," he corrected. "I'm bisexual. Just... have a slight preference, is all. I think I could only ever date a dragoness if I'm close with them. But with drakes..." he trailed off, making Bumblebee giggle. "Shut up."

"Whaaat!? It's cute!" Bumblebee laughed. "I'm pansexual, and... I have the tendency to fall in love with literally everyone I get close with, which sucks. It happened with all my friends. Especially Gale and Peacemaker."

"Yeah, that... sounds like it sucks."

"WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU STILL DOING HERE!?" A voice from the house shouted. They looked at the broken window and saw the same IceWing as before. "WHO THE FUCK IS SHE!?"

"No one, dad! She was just leaving!" Silver shouted back. His dad

hopped through the broken window and slyly walked toward the both of them, eyeing Bumblebee.

"Huh. Not a bad one. Real pretty."

Bumblebee recoiled, thoroughly uncomfortable. Silver pulled her towards him, keeping her away from his father. "Don't touch her, you creep," he growled.

"Hm. Whatever you say."

"Come on, Bumblebee." Silver kept a wing around her as he started walking away. "Twine your tail around mine," he whispered to her.

"What? Why?" Bumblebee whispered back.

"Need to make it look believable. He won't touch you if he thinks you're mine. It's... a weird respect thing." Bumblebee looked back at his dad before twining her tail with Silver's. To play into it more, she pressed herself closer to him, but found she was liking that more than she probably should, so she stopped.

When they were a reasonable distance away, Silver untwined his tail from hers and unwrapped himself from her. "I felt like he was gonna assault me in some way," Bumblebee muttered.

"I wouldn't let him do that to you."

"I know you wouldn't, but... what the hell was that?"

"He's on a watchlist here, so I think that should tell you all you need to know."

Bumblebee shuddered. "I hate it, I hate it, I hate it! I hate thinking about the fact that I could've been—"

"Again, I would never let him do that to you," Silver said sternly.

"Yeah, you'd better not!" A familiar voice said. Bumblebee looked up and saw Auklet and Cliff landing beside them, along with another IceWing. "Hey, Bumblebee."

"Mink!" The HiveWing threw herself at the IceWing, hugging her harder than she had ever hugged anyone ever and immediately forgetting about what just happened. Mink returned the hug just as hard, if not harder. Bumblebee pulled back to look her friend in the face. "You look good."

Mink gave a light chuckle. "So do you. I mean, you look like you're doing better. I missed that smile."

"Hey, we missed yours too, Mink," Auklet said. "When we saw you last month, you didn't so much as crack a smile."

"Yeah. That was... a really rough time for me. I was happy to see you guys. I really was. When you left, I started thinking about stuff and... I don't know, I felt ashamed of how I was acting around you."

"You didn't have anything to be ashamed of," Cliff said.

"I had everything to be ashamed of. And I'm sorry about how much I was hugging you guys at the time. I knew it was a lot on you, but I just needed some sort of comfort from everything that was going on.

"So I talked to Lynx a lot about everything. I can definitely see why my sister loves her. Along with being the queen's advisor and fiancée, she's also a really good therapist."

"I'm happy for you. Seriously," Bumblebee said, hugging Mink again. "Therapy has been a big help for me too. Queen Glory was really kind and got a therapist for me."

Mink smiled warmly at her before turning her head to Silver. "Hey, Silver. You know, your arm's bleeding."

"Yeah, thanks, I hadn't noticed," he grumbled. "I'll get out of your guys' scales."

"Wait, hold on," Bumblebee said, untangling herself from Mink and grabbing Silver's arm. "Why don't you stay with us?"

"Yeah, I don't see why not," Cliff said. "Maybe you were a dick before, but you've changed, and I appreciate the new you."

"BlackIce really scared the shit out of you, huh?" Auklet joked, getting Cliff to elbow her. "Hey, I'm joking. Yeah, it'd be... nice having you."

"I-I don't know. I feel like I should get back to—"

"You don't need to get back to anything. Your dad has hurt you enough. You deserve to be with dragons who aren't gonna judge you for who you are, alright? Please don't try to push us away." Bumblebee gave his arm a gentle squeeze. Silver looked like he was trying not to cry.

"I... don't know," he choked out.

"We're gonna go to a really good restaurant," Mink said. "Food's on me."

Silver paused for a second before making up his mind. "Deal."

You Gotta Let Me Do This

Moon awoke in a bed that she immediately recognized as Turtle's guest bed. Her head was spinning and she felt sick to her stomach. "Son of a bitch," she muttered to herself.

She attempted to sit up, but as soon as she was up enough, she got hit with a splitting headache. It wasn't anything she hadn't dealt with before, but it was still extremely painful, so she laid back down.

When she felt like she was okay enough to sit back up, she saw that Turtle had left her a glass of water on the bedside table. There was also a bucket on the floor just in case, which Moon had used numerous times. Thankfully, she didn't think she would throw up this time.

She stood up and stayed still, trying to make sure she could still balance before leaving the bedroom to find Turtle sitting in a chair. That was normal. What wasn't normal was BlackIce sitting in the other chair.

"Good afternoon," Turtle said, standing up and walking towards her. "How're you feeling?"

"What's he doing here?" She asked coldly. She dizzily stumbled into Turtle, who caught her. He put a wing around her and led her to sit down in the seat he was in before.

"We need to talk, Moon," he said. That was the last thing she wanted: a conversation while she was clearly hungover.

"I don't really want to, Turtle," she said, keeping her eye on BlackIce, who was leaning forward and staring at the ground. "If you want me to stop coming here while I'm drunk, then just tell me and I'll stop."

"No. I'm happy to let you stay here as much as you need. But I'm

worried about you. You do this to yourself multiple times a week and... I'm scared something will happen to you. I don't wanna lose you," Turtle explained.

"What exactly am I supposed to do? It's the only way I can get by without hurting. And you know how I feel about therapy—"

"Yeah, you think it's too expensive. Which is fair,
but you wouldn't have to pay for it. I know you don't want me to have to pay for it, so BlackIce offered to pay."

Moon looked at the hybrid who gave her a silent nod. She didn't want his money. She didn't want anything from him. She scowled at him, saying "screw you, you piece of shit."

"Moon, I'm sorry about Peacemaker. I'm sorry about Qibli. I'm sorry about *everything*. I should've killed Firn all those years ago, but... I couldn't. If I ever see him again, I promise you that—"

"Will you shut up? Why the hell are you blaming yourself? You couldn't have known any of that would happen. I was the idiot who left him with you to help with Qibli's funeral when I was supposed to look after him. It's *my* fault. And I don't have Qibli here to support me like he's always been able to before."

"Then... why are you so mad at me?"

"Because I wish Peacemaker had nothing to do with you." She stands up and starts approaching him. "You didn't kill him, but you hurt him just as much as Firn. You killed his mother, broke his arm, and were responsible for a few of his concussions."

BlackIce stands too when she gets close enough. "Moon, I—"

"You're the reason he started spiraling downward in the first place!" She's punching him in the shoulder between every word.

"Moon, please..." He grabbed her wrists, but she kept thrashing.

"All we wanted for him was a normal dragonethood! We wanted him to be happy! And *you* dragged it out of him! You miserable sack of shit! Fuck. You!" She broke down into a sob, collapsing

against him. He held her close while she cried against his chest.

BlackIce's shoulder was bleeding slightly, but he didn't pull away or push her away. She appreciated the fact that he was willing to comfort her, even after what she said.

They stood there for a very long ten minutes. Turtle had sat back down where Moon was, and BlackIce was still standing there, holding her until she felt like she couldn't cry anymore.

When all the adrenaline passed, her knuckle was starting to hurt. She pulled away from BlackIce and sat in the seat he was in before, her breath still rattling, and clutching her talon.

"Feel better?" He asked her.

"I kinda wanna punch you in the face..." she mumbled.

"If you really want to, then go for it."

She shook her head. She knew it wouldn't do her any good. She took a few deep breaths until her breathing calmed down. "I've been holding that in for a long time..."

"Well... can I take a look at your talon?" She looked at him skeptically, but gave him the talon that was hurting.

He took it gently and pressed into her knuckle, making her wince. "Sorry, I just wanted to see if it was broken or something. It's just bruised, so it'll be fine."

She pulled her talon away and stared at the ground again. "Are you actually looking for Peacemaker?"

BlackIce stared at her for a moment. "We... were. We've searched all of Pyrrhia at this point, so now we gotta search Pantala and maybe the NightWing island. I can't imagine Firn wanting to go there. I hear it's brutal for IceWings."

"I do have to ask," Turtle interjected. "What are you hoping to find? I mean, realistically, he's probably dead. I'm not sure finding his body, if it hasn't been completely disposed of, will help you feel

better."

"I want some kind of closure," Moon said. "Just... anything. I need to know whether he's dead or not. I don't just want to speculate." BlackIce nodded. She assumed that's exactly why he's been looking.

I should've been looking with him. What's wrong with me?

"So... what do you say to therapy? Neither of you will have to worry about the cost and you don't—"
"I want to look for Peacemaker with you," Moon interrupted. "I-I don't want therapy. I don't wanna sit in a room with another dragon, focusing solely on what's bothering me. That just... won't be good for me. I need something to distract me. Drinking was my escape, so if you want me to quit, then you gotta let me do this."

BlackIce stared at her, clearly unsure of what to say. He shared a glance with Turtle before sighing. "Alright. I'll take you to the hideout tomorrow. Once you're fully calmed down and not hungover. With how much you drank, you're gonna be feeling that hangover all day."

"By the way... I think I changed my mind."

"About wh—" BlackIce was cut off when Moon punched him in the face. He stumbled back and clutched his jaw as his nose started bleeding. Instead of getting upset, he sighed again. "Alright, fair enough."

"And Turtle..." She stands up and approaches the SeaWing. She hugged her friend closely, which he reciprocated. "Even though you kinda cornered me, you've been an amazing friend, taking care of me and generally just being there for me and having to deal with my drunken flirting."

"Just know that you'll always have a place to stay if you need it." She twined her tail around his. She was lucky to have him in her life.

He'd Be Good For You

"I'll try the... mountain oysters?" Auklet said. Mink almost spit out her drink while Cliff tried hard not to burst out laughing. "What's so funny?"

"Mountain oysters aren't oysters," Mink explained, still trying not to laugh so hard in the crowded restaurant.

Cliff whispered something in her ear, making her eyes go wide and she blushed. "Why the fuck do they call them 'oysters' then?"

"I don't understand what's so gross about that," Silver said. "I mean, when you're eating a cow or a bull, you're eating all parts of it, even the gross parts, right?"

"Blegh. Fish is better than beef anyway," Bumblebee said, taking a sip of water.

"I feel sorry for your tastebuds," Cliff said.

They all ordered their food and sat in slightly uncomfortable silence for a few minutes. Cliff stretched and wrapped a wing around Auklet, pulling her close, which she happily accepted. Bumblebee put a talon on Silver's bouncing leg to help him relax. Mink noticed that was something Silver did when he was nervous or stressed out.

Mink sighed, suddenly feeling slightly alone, despite the fact that she was currently surrounded by her best friends. She took another sip of her water.

Therapist said these feelings will take a long time to go away...

It took everything she had to keep her mind from wandering to Peacemaker. She's been getting better, but not a day goes by where she doesn't think about him at least once.

Her thoughts were cut off when a green SeaWing waiter refilled

their waters. "Huh, it's not very often we have this much royalty here all at once. Especially at the same table," he said. He had a cute, dopey grin on his face and he was about their age, maybe a year older.

"Hey, Trout!" Mink said. She stood up and hugged the SeaWing, who happily hugged her back.

"It's so good to see you! You look so much better than when I last saw you!"

Mink pulled back and stared into his eyes. "Yeah, I finally got some real help. I mean, the food here is great, but it won't cure depression." She glanced back at her friends and blushed slightly. "Oh! Um... guys, this is Trout. I came here a lot when I was going through a rough time, and he's been wonderful to me. Trout, these are my friends. Cliff, Auklet, Bumblebee, and Silver. They came to visit me and I thought I'd take them here."

"Well, it's nice to meet you all. Oh, Mink! Guess what. I'm gonna be going to Jade Mountain this year!" He said happily.

"Seriously!?" She hugged him again even harder

"Alright, I gotta get back to work. It was really good seeing you again, and it was nice meeting you all." He stared into her eyes for a minute before letting go of her and walking off.

Mink sat down with a blushing smile on her face, until she looked at her friends who were all staring and smiling at her. "What?"

"Haven't seen you smile like that in a long time," Cliff said.

"He seems like he'd be good for you," Bumblebee said.

"N-no, I'm... not ready for another relationship right now. I mean, he's sweet, but... I don't know." She was still blushing profusely, betraying her words. She began fidgeting with the tablecloth.

"I thought he was kinda hot," Silver mumbled.

"Yeah, he was," Auklet agreed, making Cliff do a double take. "Hey,

you can't tell me I'm wrong."

He stared at her for a second before sighing in defeat. "Yeah, he was kinda hot, I guess."

When their food arrived, Mink ate mostly silently, only speaking when spoken to. The food was delicious as always, her go-to being the sushi, but she wasn't focusing on the food as much as she was focusing on trying to keep her mind from shifting to Peacemaker.

Her therapist had told her not to fight it and to just "let it flow," but Mink didn't want to. Memories about him were too painful. And now that she had met someone else that she liked, she felt guilty. She felt like she would be betraying him.

"Mink, where do you come out on all this?" Bumblebee asked. Mink's head snapped up from her food and saw that all of her friends were staring at her and she hadn't been listening to whatever conversation they were having.

"Um... yes," she said, rubbing her eyes.

"What!? You cannot seriously think that's weird! We eat every other part of a bull, the balls aren't any different!" Cliff said.

"It's not eating the balls that's weird! It's eating the balls, and nothing else!" Auklet laughed.

"It's just another part of the bull that tastes the same as the rest of it!" Silver said.

Mink's leg started bouncing a bit like Silver's and it started getting difficult to breathe. "Excuse me." She stood up and walked out of the restaurant before one of her friends could ask if she was okay. She took a deep breath and threw some snow into her face. It didn't help however, as it was still getting harder to breathe.

Come on, I thought I was past the random panic attacks.

It didn't matter. Once she started hyperventilating and the dizziness settled in, she sat down and clutched her chest, struggling to catch her breath. "Fuck, fuck, fuck, I can't fucking do this!" she cried,

grasping her head.

Everything was spinning and it got to a point where she was worried she would pass out, but she felt a wing wrap around her and a gentle voice whispering in her ear. "Just breathe. In and out."

She looked up and saw Cliff's red face looking down at her. She leaned into him, using his grounding touch and his gentle voice as a way to find her breath again. "I'm right here. You're safe."

Mink was finally able to take a deep breath, but instead of speaking, she just sat there and leaned against the SkyWing, which he seemed perfectly fine with.

She took one more deep breath before saying, "thank you."

"What's going on?"

"Just been... thinking about Peacemaker. And Trout. Just an overwhelming feeling like I'm betraying him. I know he's dead, but I can't stop feeling like I'm still with him, you know?"

Cliff gently rubbed her back. "Well... he loved you. I think that he would want you to do what makes you happy. And if that means finding someone who makes you happy, then I'm sure he'd understand."

"I know, you're right. It's just... really hard to stick with that mindset whenever I see Trout. When I'm away, I'm fine, but when I see him, I start feeling all these emotions and I start thinking about Peacemaker again and it's super overwhelming."

"If you need, we can leave. We wouldn't wanna force you to be here if you're uncomfortable. I'm not really sure why you picked this place out for us if you knew this would happen," Cliff said.

"No, I don't wanna leave. Trout is amazing and I really wanted you guys to meet him. I just didn't expect to be panicking like that." She finally pulled away from Cliff's embrace. She was breathing steadily and her heart wasn't pounding against her chest. "I think I'm ready to go back inside though."

"You sure?" Cliff asked

"Yeah. Yeah, I'll be alright." They went back inside the restaurant, and she was immediately hugged by Bumblebee.

"Are you alright!?" The HiveWing asked.

"Everything's fine, Bumblebee. I just needed to get some fresh air." She watched Cliff sit back down beside Auklet, and Silver was silently staring down at his empty plate. Mink sat back down at her seat, where she had only eaten half of her meal. She quickly finished her food and spotted Trout helping another table.

Would it be a good idea to avoid him? I don't want to, but if I'm gonna have that visceral of a reaction, maybe it'd be for the best?

Of course, it was inevitable that she'd have to see him again. They were both going to Jade Mountain. She was so lost in thought that she didn't even notice Trout had come up to their table.

"Did you guys enjoy everything?" He asked, grabbing their empty plates.

"Everything was delicious!" Bumblebee said.

"Happy to hear it, you all have a great day. It was great seeing you again Mink, and it was wonderful meeting all of you. If you need anything else, let me know!" He began to walk off before Auklet stopped him.

"Wait, we haven't paid yet."

"It's on the house." He grins at them before walking off.

"Well, shit. I see why you like him, Mink. He's hot and nice," Auklet said, which was met with Cliff elbowing her. "What? I didn't say anything wrong!"

"It's a bad time," Cliff muttered to her.

"Oh. Sorry Mink," she said. Mink waved it off, not wanting to further continue that conversation.

She spotted Trout again, bringing food to another table and she groaned.

I need to stop staring at him. Is that weird? It probably is. Ugh, I'd never be able to avoid him when I want so badly to be near him.

When her friends began getting ready to leave, Mink followed them, but when they got to the doorway, she stopped and looked back at Trout, who was heading back into the kitchen. "Mink? You coming?" Bumblebee asked.

"Uh... yeah, just gimme a sec." She ran back into the restaurant and caught up to Trout before he could get into the kitchen.

"Whoa! Mink, are you alright?" He asked, catching her as she basically fell into him.

"I, uh... I'll see you at school," she stammered. She looked into his confused and slightly concerned eyes and before he could respond, she pulled him into a tight hug. "It was really good seeing you again."

He reciprocated the hug, though not as tight as her. "Yeah, I'll see you at school." She pulled away, feeling a little embarrassed about how hard she was hugging him. Seeing her embarrassed face, he reassured her. "Hey... I expect to be hugged that violently by you every time we see each other."

She gave him a small chuckle. "Deal. And... thanks for the free food. You really didn't have to do that."

"Yes I did. My parents made me." She forgot his family owned the restaurant. His extremely kind family with an incredibly nice and handsome son who she's been silently staring at for the last thirty seconds.

"A-alright, I guess I'll see you in a couple weeks then?" She said, blushing at her long, silent pause.

"Yeah, it'll be great!" He smiled at her again and her heart melted.

"Well, I... gotta get going, but um..." She pulled him into another

hug, but this one was a lot quicker. When she pulled away and left, she saw her friends were all still waiting outside the restaurant. "Sorry about that. I was just—"

"Yeah, we all know what you were doing," Auklet interrupted.

"I had to thank him for the free meal!" Mink defended, blushing. She looked at the sky, which was turning a sunset purple. "I can get the two guest rooms set up so you don't have to fly back in the dark."

"Really? That would be great!" Bumblebee said enthusiastically.

"Thank you Mink," Cliff said warmly.

"Only two...?" Silver mumbled, his wings drooping slightly.

"What was that?" Bumblebee asked, looking at the IceWing.

"N-nothing. It's just... I don't wanna go back home," he muttered that last part.

"Aww, he loves us," Auklet said flatly.

"Oh. You guys didn't see what his dad was like," Bumblebee said, putting a talon on Silver's shoulder.

"We saw him throw Silver out a window. How much worse could it get?" Cliff asked.

"Much worse. We keep many different lists of dragons that you should be careful around for many different reasons. His dad is on several of those lists," Mink explained.

"He was perving on me," Bumblebee said, shuddering. "It was... really uncomfortable and gross."

"Why isn't he locked up?" Auklet asked.

"Beats me. Whatever justice system we have here sucks. Snowfall's been working on changing it, but for the time being, there's nothing we can really do. Winter's sister was released a few months ago

because of some stupid bullshit that doesn't make any sense to me," Mink said, putting a wing around Bumblebee.

"Well... how about I share the guest room with Silver?" The HiveWing suggested. Immediately, Silver's eyes widened and he blushed profusely.

"N-no, th-that's okay. I can just go home and—" The words died in Silver's throat.

"Hey, it's alright. I don't mind sleeping on the floor if I have to."

"ALRIGHT, you two can hash this out on your own," Mink interrupted. "I'm gonna show you guys to your rooms. Cliff, Auklet, please try to keep quiet."

"What? Why would you—" Cliff asked, blushing.

"We're not that loud!" Auklet said defensively.

Stalactites

I'm hoping y'all can be adults about this.

BlackIce stared up at the stalactites hanging on the ceiling, bringing a lit cigarette to his mouth and inhaling. He blew out the smoke and squinted his eyes, focusing by counting each and every stalactite on the ceiling.

"Thought you quit smoking," Huntsman said, placing an ashtray on the ground beside him.

"Yeah, I say lots of things," he said, reaching a trembling talon out to put out the cigarette in the ashtray. "How's Moon?"

"In agony. Three days without a drink is really doing a number on her, BlackIce." Huntsman places a bucket on the ground beside the hybrid's head, face down, and sits on it. "And it doesn't look like it's going well for you either."

"Then go be with her. She shouldn't be alone right now if she's doing that bad," he said.

"Landslide is with her. And you look like you need someone with you too."

"This isn't my first time going through this, you know."

"Yeah, but you threw up about twenty times yesterday. Going cold turkey is a great way to make your entire body shut down and kill you. Especially with how much you've both been drinking. You both need to drink a little bit." She placed a small shot glass full of whiskey next to his head.

"You just had that ready?" He asked flatly. He stared at the glass, watching the bubbles form and pop on the surface of the whiskey. "Thanks, but no thanks."

"I'm not asking. I'll force feed it to you if I have to," Huntsman said, standing up. "I'm not letting you die trying to prove to Moon that she'll be fine. Because I know that's what you're doing."

"If I live, I live. If I die, I die. Win-win for me. If I live, I get to keep looking for Peacemaker. If I die... well... at least I'd get to be with Glacier again. And Borealis. And Spruce, and Taiga. Those two were fun. My dad... was a real world-class son of a bitch." At this point, he wasn't really even talking to Huntsman. "And then there was Cryo. Moons, was she crazy. But she saved my life. It would be nice to see her again. Then there was Downwind. You'd like him. Darkstalker's plague got to him and he only lasted about a day. Horrible immune system."

"BlackIce... are you alright?" Huntsman asked. "I don't really need a list of all your dead friends."

He finally looked at the HiveWing instead of the whiskey. He sat up, and then stood back up with her help. He faced her and held her shoulder as a sort of support. He looked into her eyes, down to her lips, then to her eyes again.

He pulled her into a soft, tender kiss. One she could easily break from if she wanted to. But she didn't. If anything, she leaned into it slightly. When they broke apart, they stared into each other's eyes again.

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BlackIce sat on the edge of his bed, where Huntsman was fast asleep. He looked at the skyfire he had on his table. Not wanting to wake Huntsman, he slowly stood up, placed the skyfire in a wristpouch that he buckled around his arm, and left the cave.

He went to the cave Moon was in, where she was also asleep. Landslide was in there too, reading a scroll. "Oh, hey," he whispered.

BlackIce put his talon by Moon's nose to make sure she was breathing. When he felt her steadily exhaling against his knuckle, he pulled away.

"How's she been?" BlackIce asked, sitting beside the MudWing.

"Started relaxing after Huntsman gave her a shot of whiskey. Did she give you one?"

"Uh-huh."

"Did you drink it?"

No answer.

"Landslide... why don't you head out. I can watch her," BlackIce offered.

"You sure? You don't exactly... look like you're doing well."

"I'm fine. Really." Landslide didn't really seem convinced, but he stood up. He stopped at the entrance to the cave.

"I know it's none of my business... but did you have sex with Huntsman?"

"You're right. It's none of your business," BlackIce said. Landslide looked at Moon one more time before leaving the cave.

There the hybrid sat, in near silence, only being broken by Moon's gentle breathing. His mind starts wandering a bit. Thinking about Peacemaker, then Huntsman, then Glacier.

Why did I ramble to her about all of that? More than that, why did I kiss her? Even more than that... ugh...

He clutched his aching head with his trembling talons.

I should have taken that shot...

He watched Moon stir slightly in her sleep. For the first time since she got here, she actually looked relaxed, which was a relief. Though, she was shivering slightly. Whether that was from being cold, or from the lack of alcohol in her inebriated system, he didn't know. But just in case, he opened a drawer and pulled out an extra blanket and draped it over her body.

"Hey, BlackIce?" The hybrid's head snapped toward the entrance and saw Coldsnap standing there. "You got a visitor."

"Oh. Alright, um... gimme a minute," BlackIce said.

"Not... really an option," the IceWing said as another IceWing shoved past him.

"Winter?" BlackIce said exasperatedly.

"I *knew* she was here! What did you do to her!?" When Winter yelled at him, Moon jerked awake.

"W-Winter?" She blinked. "What're you doing here?"

The ex-prince shoved past BlackIce and knelt down to Moon's side. "Are you okay? Did he hurt you?"

"N-no, he was... for lack of better words, taking care of me," she insisted.

"And she was sleeping peacefully before you barged in here," BlackIce said. He turned his attention to Coldsnap for a second. "Hey, could you go get me the whiskey shot that Huntsman gave me."

"Are you turning her into an alcoholic?" Winter growled.

"He didn't do that to me. I did that myself," Moon said, grabbing Winter's arm.

"What're you talking about?" He asked, placing a cool talon on her head.

So Moon explained everything to him. When she started drinking, everything with Turtle, when she ran into BlackIce at the bar, and when he took her here. How he had been helping her with her alcoholism, and doing everything he could to keep her as comfortable as possible.

Coldsnap had brought the shot to the hybrid, which he happily took. The effects weren't immediate, though. It took most of Moon's

explanation to finally kick in. His trembling had slowed down considerably, but not completely.

When Moon finished, Winter just sat back, looking down at his talons. "Shit..." he murmured. "I... don't even know what to say."

"I guess there isn't really anything to say. Just... I'm sorry I didn't tell you," Moon said. She reached out to hold his arm, but Winter pulled away.

"I-I should be the one saying I'm sorry. I should've been there for you, but... I got too absorbed with work. It was an escape for me."

"Well... I guess we were both looking for escapes, huh?" Winter let her hold his arm, and she slid it down to his talon.

"I'm sorry I wasn't there," he muttered. Moon finally sat up, clutching her head as the dizziness set in. Winter sat down in the bed beside her.

"You're welcome to stay here too, Winter," BlackIce said, stepping out of the room. He sighed as he began walking back to his sleeping cave, and when he got there, he was reminded of why he left it in the first place.

Huntsman was still sleeping peacefully in his bed, breathing lightly. He sat down on the edge of the bed and clutched his aching head. It took him a minute to finally lay down on his back beside the HiveWing. When he realized that sleep was a long way away, all he could really do was stare at the ceiling and count the stalactites again.